LESLIE WEST INTERVIEW!

Guitar & Bass

SIXTIES Stratocasters

How Fender's flagship model came back in from the cold

Epiphone & Michael Kelly guitars tested

Anthem PUBLISHING
JANUARY 2014 Vol 25 No 04 £4.25
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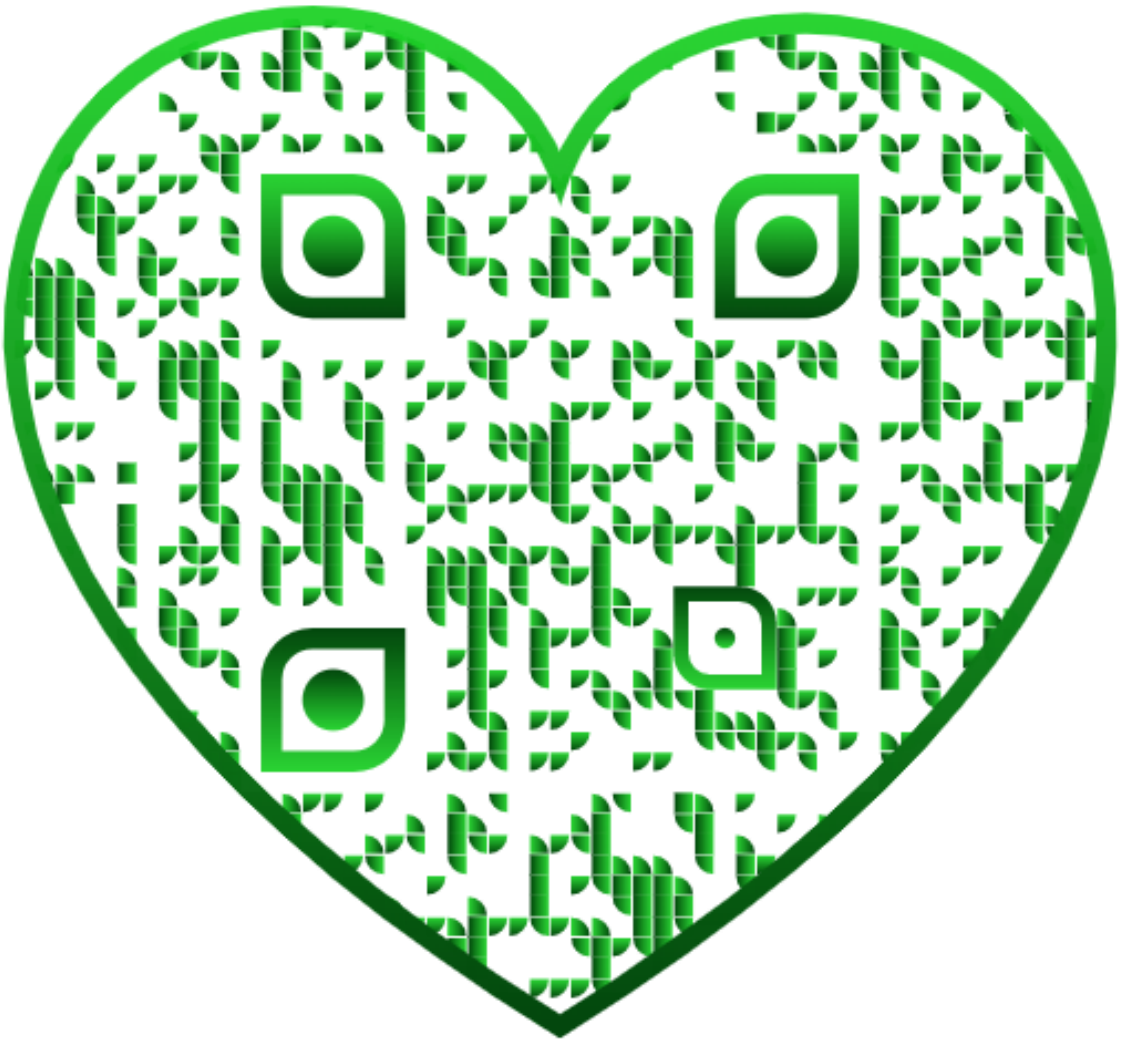
Robbie McIntosh's Private Collection

PLUS!

Takamine
Martin Barre
Yamaha
Joe Bonamassa
Carvin
and more...



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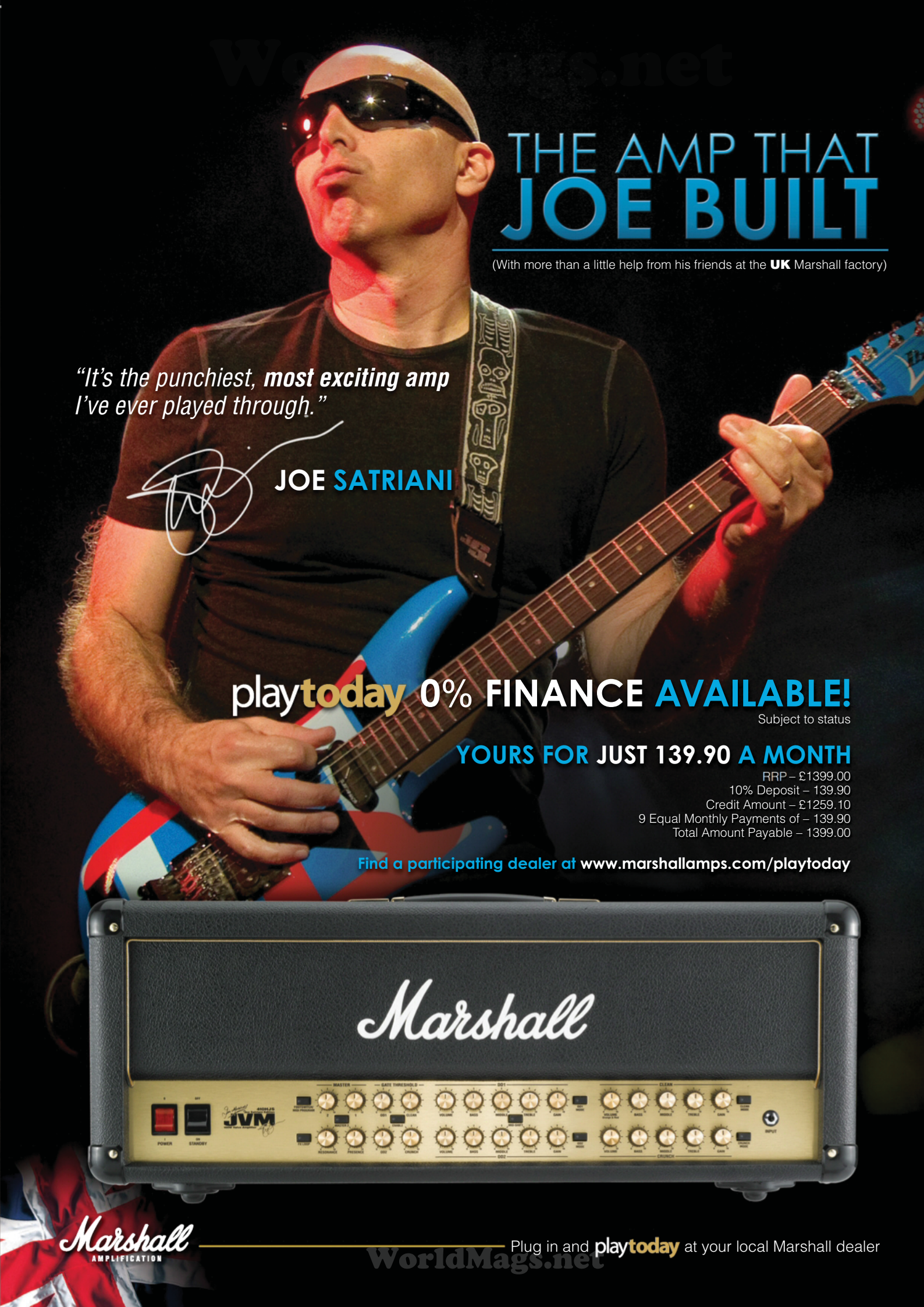

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Electric Guitars

8030 - 1963 Gibson ES175 Jazz Guitar, Sunburst
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag
10066 - Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry
10055 - Brian May Red Special, Metal May
7028 - Brian May Red Special, Antique Cherry
10065 - Brian May Red Special, Baby Blue
10061 - Brian May Red Special, Black
10063 - Brian May Red Special, Gold
10064 - Brian May Red Special, Green
10059 - Brian May Red Special, Honey Sunburst
10058 - Brian May Red Special, Natural
10057 - Brian May Red Special, Sunburst
10062 - Brian May Red Special, White
10060 - Brian May Red Special, Windermere Blue
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
10231 - Brooks Custom Steve, Lukather Clone
9767 - Cort G260 Electric Guitar
10224 - Cort M600 AVD Antique Violin Dark
10220 - Cort Sunset I in Black
10223 - Cort X6 S-M BK Electric Guitar in Black
7793 - DBZ Barchetta Eminent FR Absinthe
7785 - DBZ Barchetta ST, Aubergine
7789 - DBZ Barchetta ST FR, Cobalt Blue
7814 - DBZ Crucifixion Electric Guitar
7810 - DBZ Dark Angel Electric Guitar
7812 - DBZ Bare Bones Religion Series Devil
7811 - DBZ Bare Bones Religion Series Preacher
7800 - DBZ Bolero AB, Solid Wine Red
7796 - DBZ Bolero FM, Trans Wine
7794 - DBZ Bolero ST, Black
7837 - DBZ Venom, Dark Blue Metallic
9770 - Dean Evo, Pre-Owned
5043 - Duesenberg 49er Cow Limited Edition
5040 - Duesenberg Rocket II in Black & White
10233 - ESP LTD MH50, Black, Pre-Owned
9769 - Encore Electric Guitar, Black
5205 - Epiphone Broadway Jazz Semi, Natural
8220 - Epiphone ES339 Semi Hollowbody, Ebony
9155 - Epiphone ES339, Natural
8528 - Epiphone ES339 Ultra, Vintage Sunburst
5432 - Epiphone G310 SG Shape, White
9631 - Epiphone Joe Pass Emperor II, Natural
9695 - Epiphone Les Paul Special II Cherryburst
9905 - Epiphone LP Stan Plustop Pro, Cherry S/B
10351 - Epiphone LP Stand. Plustop Pro, Wine Red
8365 - Epiphone Les Paul Standard in Gold
10352 - Epiphone Les Paul Standard, Ebony
10217 - Epiphone Les Paul Studio, Sunburst, S/H
9604 - Epiphone Les Paul Ultra III Alpine White
8096 - Epiphone Ltd Ed Flying V, Antique White
8165 - Epiphone Ltd Ed 1961 SG, Alpine White
9666 - Epiphone Phrophecy LP Custom Plus GX
8101 - Epiphone by Gibson, Pre-Owned
4231 - Fender Am Special Strat, Candy Apple Red
9074 - Fender American Special Strat, Sunburst
9914 - Fender Am. Special Tele, Vintage Blonde
9348 - Fender American Stan. Hand Stained Strat
10199 - Fender Am Stand. Strat LH, Sburst
9910 - Fender Am Standard Strat, Mystic Blue
8342 - Fender Am Standard Strat, Sienna Sburst
9134 - Fender American Stratocaster Daphne Blue
9023 - Fender American Vintage '70s Strat Reissue, Nat
9287 - Fender Blacktop Stratocaster HH, Black
10072 - Fender Classic Player Baja Telecaster, Blonde
9261 - Fender C. Player Jaguar Spec HH, White
9559 - Fender Custom Shop 1960 Relic Strat, GR
7112 - Fender Deluxe Lonestar Strat, Sunburst
10163 - Fender FSR 72 Telecaster Deluxe, Aqua Flake
10198 - Fender FSR Am Stan. Strat, LH, Sunburst
9085 - Fender FSR Strat HSS TBX Amber Burst
10218 - Fender Japanese Strat, CAR, Pre-Owned
4634 - Fender Jim Root Signature Strat, Black
9775 - Fender Johnny Marr Jaguar, Metallic KO
10164 - Fender Kurt Cobain Mustang, Sonic Blue
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9945 - Fender Modern Player Strat HSS, O. White
8224 - Fender Modern Player Telecaster, Honey Burst
8286 - Fender Modern Player Tele Thinline Delux
7784 - Fender Mustang Pawn Shop Special, Red
9089 - Fender Pawn Shop 51 Stratocaster, Black
9090 - Fender Pawn Shop 51 Stratocaster, Blonde
10149 - Fender Pink Paisley Telecaster, Used
5287 - Fender Road Worn 50s Strat in Black
8290 - Fender Road Worn 60's Strat, Sunburst
4229 - Fender Road Worn Player Strat, Sunburst
4232 - Fender Road Worn Player Tele, Black
9449 - Fender Select Tele USA Violin Burst
10101 - Fender Standard Strat, CAR, Secondhand
7954 - Fender Standard Strat, Copper Met Burst
4560 - Fender Standard Telecaster, Black
4748 - Fender Standard Tele, Brown Sunburst
10090 - Fender Telebration Mahogany Tele, Sburst
9911 - Fender USA 75 Telebration, Natural
9507 - Fender USA Hardtail Stratocaster 1977
8285 - Fret King Jerry Donahue, Natural
9137 - G&L ASAT Classic Bluesboy Semi, Natural
9140 - G&L ASAT Classic in Walnut
9136 - G&L Legacy in Black
9135 - G&L S500 in Blueburst
9150 - Gibson ES137 Custom, Triburst
8029 - Gibson ES175 1956 Original
9277 - Gibson ES330 VOS, Vintage Sunburst
10146 - Gibson ES335 Dot Plain Gloss, Sunburst

Electric Guitars

10273 - Gibson ES339 Antique Sunburst
9840 - Gibson Lee Roy Parnell Goldtop
8376 - Gibson Les Paul Classic 60s Trans Ebony
5317 - Gibson Les Paul Custom in Alpine White
7919 - Gibson Les Paul Custom in Wine Red
10197 - Gibson Les Paul Signature T, Trans Ebony
9444 - Gibson Les Paul Standard 2012 Goldtop
10116 - Gibson Les Paul Std 2013 Prem. Tea Burst
10117 - Gibson Les Paul Std 2013 Premi. Trans Amber
10144 - Gibson LP St Premium Plus, Desert Burst
10322 - Gibson Les Paul Stand., Heritage Cherry
9341 - Gibson Les Paul Studio, Radiant Red
5090 - Gibson Les Paul Studio Lefty, Wine Red
9557 - Gibson Les Paul Studio, Vintage Sunburst
10281 - Gibson Les Paul Trad., Caramel Burst
8202 - Gibson Nighthawk. Pelham Blue
5594 - Gibson SG Special Electric Guitar in White
10350 - Gibson SG Special Faded Cherry
10268 - Gretsch G5422TDCG Hollow Body ,White
9771 - Ibanez S470DXQM
9764 - Italia Electric Guitar, Pre-Owned
9161 - Jackson RR5 Japanese Ivory Pinstripe
4992 - Jackson JS30 Randy Rhoads, Black
4150 - Jackson SL3MG Soloist, Natural
9669 - Jackson Super Light Soloist SLSXMG GMG
0000 - Levin - 7 models in stock now
8051 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Black
8052 - Lodestone Electric Artist in Sunburst
8048 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Honey
8049 - Lodestone Electric Artist, Trans Red
8059 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Chignal Blue
8065 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Rodings White
8058 - Lodestone Electric Pro S, Tobacco Sburst
8066 - Lodestone Electric Pro S in Waltham Black
8055 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Chignal Blue
8056 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Rodings White
8053 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Roxwell Red
8057 - Lodestone Electric Pro, St James Silver
8054 - Lodestone Electric Pro, Tobacco Sunburst
8072 - Lodestone Electric Standard S, T. Sburst
8070 - Lodestone Electric Standard Trans Black
8071 - Lodestone Electric Standard S, White
8069 - Lodestone Electric Standard in White
8085 - Lodestone Pulse in Burr Maple Honeyburst
8086 - Lodestone Pulse, Matt Black
8084 - Lodestone Pulse in Metallic Gold
8087 - Lodestone Pulse, Tobacco Sunburst
7091 - MusicMan Luke HSS, Pearl Blue
4720 - MusicMan Silhouette Special, Candy Red
0000 - PRS - 12 Models in stock now
6123 - Patrick Eggle Double Cutaway in Blue
6121 - Patrick Eggle RSG Electric Guitar, Amber
9478 - Peavey AT200 Antares AutoTune Guitar
9450 - Peavey EVH Wolfgang USA-Made Goldtop
9001 - Peavey Rockmaster Captain America
9300 - Peerless Martin Taylor Virtuoso
4268 - Rickenbacker 330 12 String Semi, Jetglo
6951 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Fireglo
6952 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Jetglo
4270 - Rickenbacker 360 Semi, Mapleglo
10165 - Road Worn Player Tele, Candy Apple Red
8992 - Roland G5 Strat COSM Technology Black
8993 - Roland G5 Strat COSM Technology Sunburst
9857 - Roland G5A Strat Candy Apple Red
8990 - Roland GC1 Black GK-Ready Stratocaster
8991 - Roland GC1 Sunburst GK-Ready Strat
0000 - Squier - 6 models in stock now
0000 - Stagg - 3 models in stock now
9273 - Steinberger Spirit GT Pro
10131 - Traveller Speedster, Blue, Pre-Owned
9079 - Ventures VM100SB Bob Bogle Sig, Sunburst
9078 - Ventures VM65MBL Electric Guitar, Blue
4256 - Vintage AV2, Sunburst
9420 - Vox Apache I
9652 - Warwick Electric Guitar Accessory Pack
6982 - Washburn USADD70MayaDanDonegan,Grey
4757 - Washburn N1 Vintage Nuno Bettencourt Nat
7074 - Washburn SI61 Obey Scott Ian Sig, Black
6991 - Washburn USA Custom WI556, Metallic Red
6997 - Washburn V200 ProE in Black
7005 - Washburn WI100, Gunmetal Grey
7002 - Washburn WI100, Red
7009 - Washburn WI15 Idol Standard ,Black
8412 - Washburn WI18 Idol Quilted Trans Black
8411 - Washburn WI18 Idol Quilted Trans Red
7356 - Washburn WI420KB Idol, Black
8409 - Washburn WI-440F Idol Elect Flame Honey
8408 - Washburn WI-440F Idol Tobacco Sunburst
8406 - Washburn WI-460E Idol Electric, Black
8405 - Washburn WI-460E Idol Electric in White
6988 - Washburn WI50 in Black
6989 - Washburn WI50 Pro-E, Black
8404 - Washburn WI-63 SF Donegan Sig, Black
6995 - Washburn WV40VASIK Scott Ian Blood Splat
6996 - Washburn WV66ANC, Nick Catanese, Black
6898 - Washburn WI14 Idol in Metallic Blue
6899 - Washburn WI14 Idol in Wine Red
8230 - Washburn X10 Bass Guitar, Black
6895 - Washburn X100 in Metallic Grey
6900 - Washburn X200 Pro in Trans Black
6425 - Westcoast ST Junior in Black & Sunburst
6449 - Westcoast ST1 in Ivory, Red & Natural
8416 - Yamaha Pacifica 012 in Red Metallic
8414 - Yamaha Pacifica 012, Dark Blue Metallic
10234 - Yamaha Pacifica 012 in Black
8121 - Yamaha Pacifica 311H, Vintage White
8184 - Yamaha Pacifica 510V , Candy Apple Red
10319 - Yamaha Pacifica 611 VHFM
8124 - Yamaha Pacifica 611 Root Beer

Acoustic & Electro Acoustics

8033 - Breedlove AD25/SM
8035 - Breedlove AJ250/SF Plus Electro Acoustic
10296 - Breedlove Atlas Solo Series C350/CR
10284 - Breedlove Cascade C25/CRE Electro
10285 - Breedlove Cascade OM/CRe S Cutaway
10287 - Breedlove Passport C250/COe Electro
10288 - Breedlove Passport D/MMe Electro
10289 - Breedlove Passport D250SMe Electro
10299 - Breedlove Passport PLUS D/CME Electro
10292 - Breedlove Passport Plus C250/SBe Elect
7979 - Breedlove Passport Plus C250SFE
4282 - Breedlove Passport + D/SFE Elec Sunburst
10301 - Breedlove Passport Plus D250/SB Electro
10300 - Breedlove Passport Plus OM/CMe HH
10294 - Breedlove Retro D/ERe with LR Baggs
10295 - Breedlove Retro OM/ER Orchestra Electro
10298 - Breedlove Revival OM/SMe Top Burst
4283 - Breedlove Solo C35/Sme Electro, Natural
10069 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Black
10068 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Cherry
10071 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Red
10070 - Brian May Rhapsody Electro, Sunburst
10219 - Cort NDX50 Electro Acoustic Guitar, Nat
10221 - Cort SFX-E NS Electro, Natural Satin
10125 - DRL 008 8 String Electro Acoustic Guitar
10124 - DRL CT09 Thinline Electro Acoustic
4769 - EKO Ranger EQ Vintage Series, Black
8905 - Eko Ranger Vintage 12 String w/Fishman
9206 - Epiphone EJ200CE, Natural
5157 - Epiphone EJ200CE Jumbo Vintage SunB.
9542 - Faith FMETB Mercury Electro Parlour
9104 - Faith Saturn Cutaway High Gloss FSCEHG
8300 - Faith FECS Electro Acoustic Guitar
10320 - Fender CD60CE Mahogany
7881 - Fender Kingman SCE, Dreadnought, Nat
6929 - Fender Stratacoustic, Electro, Black
10194 - Fender T-Bucket 300CE, Amber
6930 - Fender Telecoustic, Electro, Black
10243 - Fender Tim Armstrong Deluxe
10106 - Fylde Alchemist Electro Acoustic
7867 - Gibson J200 Standard Electro in Natural
7032 - Gibson J200 Standard Jumbo Guitar
8241 - Gibson J200 Studio, Vintage Sunburst
10150 - Gibson J35 Electro Acoustic Guitar, Nat
10143 - Gibson LG2 American Eagle
10147 - Gibson SJ100 Modern Classic V.Sunburst
8091 - Jimmy Moon 0003CE Electro Acoustic
4555 - Jimmy Moon Bryan Adams Signature
4554 - Jimmy Moon PF0003 Electro, Pau Ferro
6948 - Jimmy Moon RD3, Electro, Natural
9552 - LAG T300AE Electro Acoustic Guitar
7302 - LAG T66ACE Auditorium Cutaway Electro
7972 - LAG T200ACE Auditorium Cutaway Electric
5403 - Levin LD60CE, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
9243 - James Neligan NA72CBB Electro Acoustic
0000 - Levin - 5 models in stock now
8277 - Martin DC15ME Dreadnought Cutaway
6404 - Northwood R70 00 14fret Electro, Natural
4400 - Northwood R80, 000V Electro, Natural
6403 - Northwood R80, 0M Electro, Natural
9841 - Ovation Adamas 1581-7 Electro Acoustic
5093 - Ovation CDX24 Electro Acoustic in Natural
10033 - Ovation Celebrity CC44S AB, Autumn
10031 - Ovation Pro Elite 2078AX
10032 - Ovation Pro Elite TX 1868TX Super
10151 - Ovation Pro Speciality 1773AX-4 Natural,
9299 - Peerless Martin Taylor Maestro
10095 - RainSong BI-JM1000N2 Graphite Guitar
10094 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10038 - Rainsong S-DR1000 Graphite Guitar
9820 - Rainsong CO-DR1000N2
9821 - Rainsong CO-JM1000N2
9819 - Rainsong CO-OM1000N2
9818 - Rainsong CO-WS1000N2
9814 - Rainsong DR1000 Graphite Guitar
10097 - Rainsong H-DR1100N2
10100 - Rainsong H-OM1000N2
10098 - Rainsong H-WS1000N2
9815 - Rainsong JM1000 Graphite Guitar
4812 - RainSong OM1000
10082 - RainSong P12 Parlor
10084 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Blue
10086 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Green
10085 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Pewter
10087 - RainSong P12 Parlor in Red
10088 - RainSong P14 Parlor
10091 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Blue
10092 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Green
10093 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Pewter
10089 - RainSong P14 Parlor in Red
9824 - Rainsong S-DR1000N2 Dreadnought Std
9823 - Rainsong S-OM1000N2 OM Studio Electro
9822 - Rainsong S-WS1000N2 WS Studio Electro
9827 - RainSong SG Shorty Gloss Shorty Series
9828 - RainSong Shorty Fine Texture SFT Model
7974 - Rainsong WS1000 Graphite Guitar
5257 - Satori YD18EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5256 - Satori YD28EQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
5252 - Satori YD28HEQ, Dreadnought Electro, Nat
8234 - Satori YD42EQ Electro Acoustic
5255 - Satori YO28HEQ, OM Electro, Natural
9536 - Sigma 000MC 15E Electro Acoustic Guitar
10303 - Takamine EG340SC, Pre-Owned
0000 - Tanglewood - 17 models in stock now
10118 - Terry Pack PLSR Parlour w/Pre-Amp
9615 - Terry Pack SJRS Small Jumbo LR Baggs M1A
8007 - Vintage Gordon Giltrap Signature
9561 - Vintage VEC1400 Electro Acoustic
9535 - Walden CG570CE Electro Acoustic Guitar
8307 - Westcoast SW201BK -VT Acoustic Guitar
8305 - Westcoast SW201RDS VT Electro Acoustic
8306 - Westcoast SW201VT Acoustic Guitar
6960 - Yamaha CPX500 Electro in Red
9190 - Yamaha CPX700 Electro Dusk Sun Red
8020 - Yamaha CPX700, Tinted Finish
9191 - Yamaha FGX730SC Electro Acoustic, Nat.
9192 - Yamaha FJX730SC Electro Acoustic, Black
6965 - Yamaha FX370C Electro Acoustic in Nat.
8141 - Yamaha SLG110S Silent Steel String

Bass Guitars

8687 - Breedlove Passport Plus B350/CB4
10297 - Breedlove Solo BJ350/CMe4 Fretless Bass
10067 - Brian May Bass in Cherry with Gig Bag
4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
10108 - Cort A4 4 String Bass Guitar, Natural
10107 - Cort A4 Custom Z 4 String Bass Guitar
10109 - Cort A5 5 String Bass, Open Pore Natural
10105 - Cort A5 OPBC Bass Guitar
10110 - Cort B5 5 String Bass Guitar, OPN
10213 - Cort GB75WBL 5 String Bass, White Blonde
10242 - ESP LTD B204 SM, Natural, Pre-Owned
4882 - Fender USA 62 Vintage Precision Sunburst
10166 - Fender 75 Jazz Bass in Natural
9083 - Fender Am Special Jazz Bass, Sunburst
9353 - Fender Am St Hand Stained Ash Jazz Bass
9231 - Fender Am Standard Jazz Bass, Sunburst
7943 - Fender Am Stan Precision Bass, Sunburst
9727 - Fender FSR Precision, Sea Foam Metallic
8113 - Fender Modern Player Available To Order
9367 - Fender Select Jazz Bass, Amber Burst
9284 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Arctic White
8287 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Brown S.burst
9909 - Fender Standard P Bass, Lake Placid Blue
10113 - G & L M2000 4 String Bass Guitar, Honeyburst
10112 - G & L M2500 5 String Bass, Honeyburst
9703 - G & L Tribute Series JB2, Natural
9138 - G&L L2000 Tribute Bass, 3-Tone Sunburst
9702 - G&L L2500 5 String Bass, Walnut
9593 - Gibson Firebird Studio Reverse 70s Bass
9575 - Gibson Grabber 3 '70s Tribute Honeyburst
10074 - Gretsch G6073 Electrotone Bass, Burgundy
0000 - Levin - 7 models in stock now
8073 - Lodestone Primal Artist
8075 - Lodestone Primal Instinct J Bass, Green
8079 - Lodestone Primal Instinct P Bass, Green
8080 - Lodestone Primal Instinct Pbass Sunburst
8081 - Lodestone Primal Pro in Chignal Blue
8082 - Lodestone Primal Pro 4, Tobacco Sunburst
8174 - Lodestone Primal Pro 5, Chignal Blue
4179 - Marleaux Consat Custom 5, Satin Black
10279 - Marleaux Consat Sig 4 String Bolt On
5713 - Marleaux M Bass Custom 5, Maple & Walnut
10278 - Marleaux Votan XS Deluxe, Black
10216 - MusicMan Sterling 4, Blue, Pre-Owned
4703 - MusicMan Stingray 2EQ, Blue Pearl
4781 - MusicMan Stingray 3EQ, True Gold
4920 - MusicMan Stingray 5, Black
8997 - Musicman Sterling SB14 Bass, Sunburst
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
9002 - Overwater Aspiration Deluxe Bass, Black
8435 - Overwater Aspiration Std 4, Black Cherry
7849 - Overwater Contemporary Jazz, Trans Blue
9009 - Overwater Contemporary 5-String Bass
9867 - Overwater Inspiration Jazz PJ 4 String
10102 - Overwater J Series Deluxe 4, Natural
7259 - Overwater Perception Std 5, Bubinga
10152 - Overwater Progress Deluxe, Pre-Owned
9418 - Rickenbacker Bass, Jetglo Rick Kemp
5121 - Rockbass Streamer LX5, Black
7204 - Squier Classic Vibe Precision 50s Blonde
9072 - Squier Vintage Modified 70's Jazz, Nat
9517 - Squier Vintage Modified Tele Bass, Black
9704 - Stagg BC300 Lefthanded 4 String, Nat
4417 - Steinberger Spirit XT2 4 String Bass
9428 - Tobias Toby Standard IV Bass Guitar, White
9653 - Warwick Bass Guitar Accessory Gig Pack
6447 - Westcoast BG2, Natural or Trans Red
6446 - Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body, Brown
6445 - Westcoast BG5 Fretless, Natural
6448 - Westcoast JB5, Trans Amber
8438 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Black
8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red
10120 - Yamaha BB1024X 4 String, Caramel Brown
4649 - Yamaha BB2024X, Vintage White
9350 - Yamaha BB424 Bass Guitar in Black
9351 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass Guitar, Black
9352 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass, Sunburst
9000 - Yamaha RBX170
10314 - Yamaha RBX170EW Bass
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass
4331 - Yamaha TRB1004J, Trans Black
10307 - Yamaha TRBX304 Bass
10308 - Yamaha TRBX305 Bass
10310 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

Classical Guitars

0000 - Azahar - 6 models in stock now
10290 - Breedlove Passport N250/COe Electro
7365 - Jose Ferrer 3/4 Size Classical Guitar
0000 - Mendieta - 6 models in stock now
9482 - Ovation 1616 Classical Guitar, Pre-Owned
0000- Raimundo - 4 models in stock now
0000 - Ramirez - 10 models in stock now
5828 - Roberto - 3 models in stock now
5481 - Strunal Electro Classical Guitar
9404 - Takamine G344RC Electro, Wine Red
0000 - Tanglewood - 4 models in stock now
8351 - Westcoast - 5 models in stock now
10323 - Yamaha CGX102 Guitar
10321 - Yamaha NTX700 Guitar

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

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Guitar & Bass

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Getting back in the swing of things...

As much as the Stratocaster is considered by many to be the definitive electric guitar, it's inevitable that throughout its long history it's fallen out of fashion at times. Eventually, a new generation comes along to take advantage of the Strat's famed versatility and use it to stamp their own mark on music history. That certainly was the case back in the 1960s, and this month's cover story goes deep into the reasons why – as well as chronicling the Strat's development as an instrument and finding out what kind of new music it inspired.

In our reviews section this month the latest contestants to undergo a thorough *Guitar & Bass* test include offerings from Epiphone, Takamine, Yamaha and TC Electronic. Plus we have interviews with legends Martin Barre, Leslie West and Joe Bonamassa, workshops, and plenty of droolsome vintage loveliness to sustain us all for the next month. Have wonderful guitar-playing existences one and all, and we hope you enjoy the issue...

John

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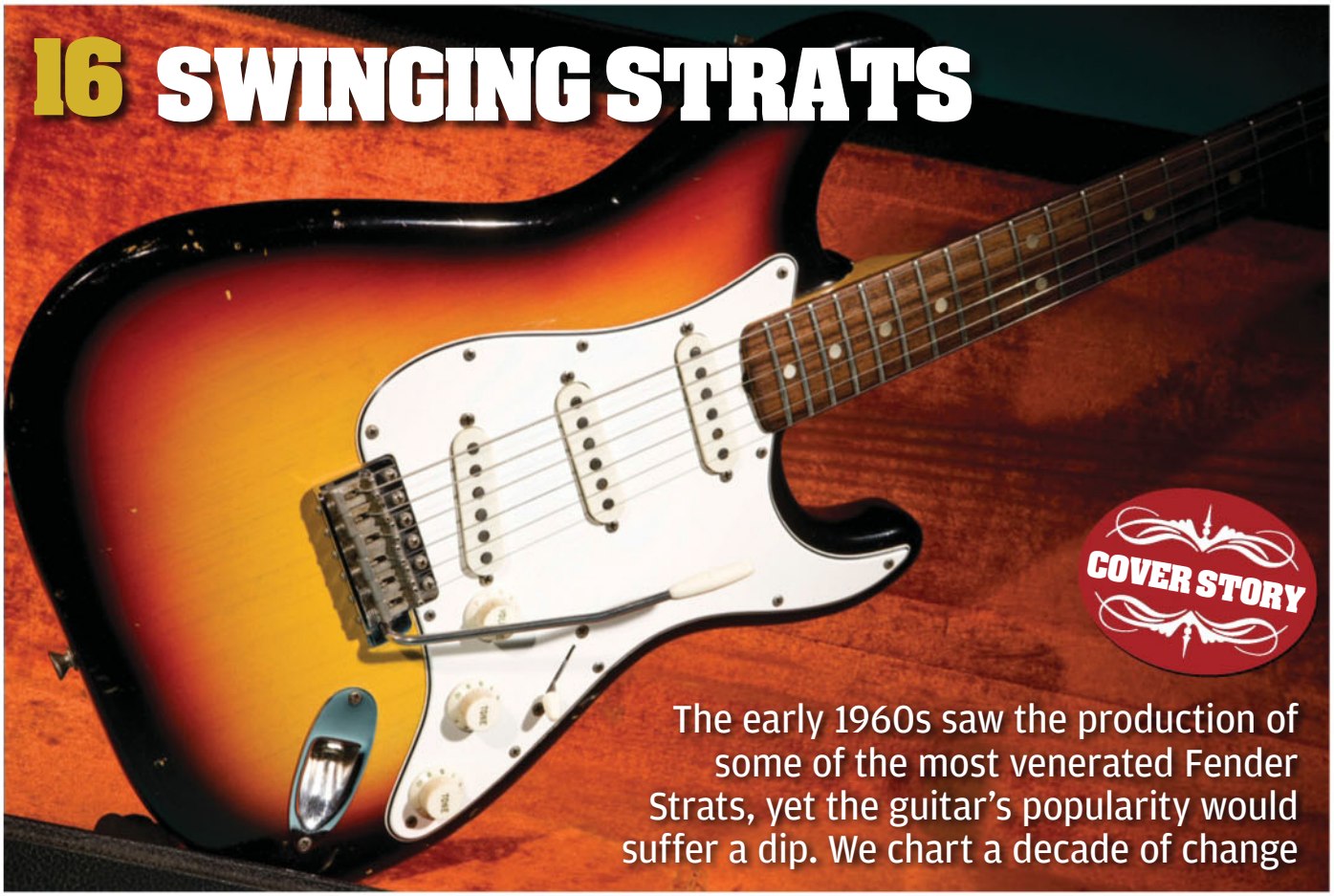

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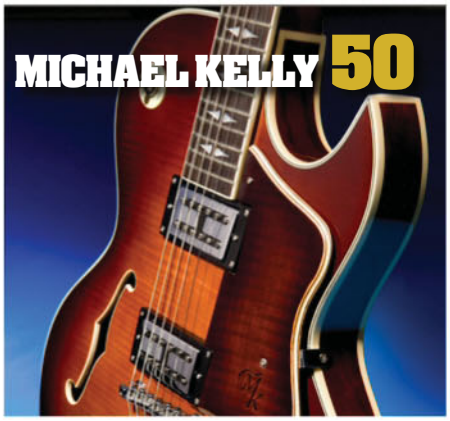
Cover photo: Claire Collins



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Reverberations

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Please note, we reserve the right to edit where we feel it is appropriate, or to print extracts from longer correspondences

STAR LETTER

FEEL THE FEAR – AND PLAY ANYWAY

I am writing this letter in the faint hope that this public admission may help to cure me of my terrible affliction or at least bring comfort to others when they realise that they are not the only person to suffer from 'Guitarshopplayingaphobia'. You see, I dread playing a guitar in a guitar shop. I avoid it at any cost, I have a list of standard excuses that I use time and time again to avoid being found out.

Why? Let me explain. As soon as I pick up a guitar and plug it into an amp I suddenly feel that everybody in the shop will be listening and judging my ability, like some terrible *X Factor* panel. The first hurdle is tuning. Why is the guitar I choose never in tune? Why is it that the simple act of tuning will suddenly escape me and something which I do with out a second thought at home,will become an impossible task? I fail time and time again to get it in tune and meanwhile the panel of fellow musicians are shaking their heads in despair: he can't even tune it!

Then, what do I play? I can't think of anything, I stare blankly at the neck, twiddle with the pickup selector or the tone knobs looking for suggestions. I think of something but this is where co-ordination sneaks away and hides, sniggering in the corner. My fingers feel like lead, I can't even bend to pitch, and to cap it all my mind goes blank. I can't remember the chords, the order of notes; I fumble, hit wrong notes, mumble excuses: 'Haven't played in a while... recovering from a ruptured tendon on my finger...' (actual event, but long since healed). I unplug the guitar hang it up and leave, tail between my legs.

Last week I ventured into Bairds in Belfast and there hanging on the wall was a '63 Strat, my dream guitar. In all of my 45 years of life on this planet I have never seen one in the flesh. The helpful friendly staff let me take it down, examine it, drool over it... and then the bubble bursts. 'Plug it in, give it a go,' he kindly offered. My phobia took hold. 'My wife and daughter are waiting in the car, I'll come back when I have more time!' I exclaim. But of course I never will. I lied. I'll probably never get the chance to fulfil my boyhood dream ever again. Guitarshopplayingaphobia strikes... will I ever be cured?

AKA Jimir (name withheld to prevent identification) *via email*

G&B **Sorry to hear about your troubles, and we know you're not the only person to ever walk out of a shop because they experience something like this; we're not medical professionals or counsellors, so to bandy about words such as 'phobia' or 'anxiety attack' isn't sensible. Obviously if your situation goes beyond the kind of nerves many players (us included) experience when trying out a guitar in front of people, it might be worth talking to someone qualified in helping you through it. If it isn't, then there are some things you can do to make trying out a guitar a more enjoyable experience. You mention tuning, but you don't mention whether you tune by ear or using a tuner. If you don't bring a tuner with you, feel free to do so – it saves time and avoid the problems of trying to tune in a noisy environment. Alternatively, it's not unreasonable to ask the person helping you to tune the guitar; they should be used to dealing with beginners who don't know how to tune a guitar. As for actually playing, you'll probably have to go some to be the worst player the salesperson has ever dealt with. As long as you're civil, don't play too loud, and have a serious interest in purchasing a guitar, that's all that matters. The natural instinct to rush through the process of trying the guitar out is the hard one to fight. The sensible thing to do while getting over the butterflies is just sit with the guitar for a bit. If you're worried about others, call or visit the shop beforehand in order to confirm a quiet time to visit – or ask if there is a room in the shop to try things out away from others. You could also bring your amp, and maybe a pair of headphones, to ease your mind. Regardless, it's sensible to just sit (or stand) with the guitar for a bit to get a feel for the weight and balance. It's okay to have a close look of various aspects of the guitar, such as the neck and the bridge to check out the build quality. Remember, you're not playing a gig, you're checking a guitar out. Going through bits and pieces of scales, riffs and chords of the kind you normally play is a great way to evaluate a guitar; no one is expecting you to play a song or solo from start to finish. Doing some basic chords of the kind you first learned when starting out is recommended, as it allows you to compare it to every other guitar you've ever played. And keep in mind that the salesperson is far more concerned with whether or not you're damaging the guitar – and if you look like you're going to buy the instrument – to care about how good a player you are. Now if you were trying to impress people who work in a music shop with your playing, that would be a challenge. But losing out on the joys of trying guitars out – especially a dream instrument – is a shame. Of course, you can buy online, or arrange a deal with a shop to try the guitar for a certain time and return it for a full refund provided it's in perfect condition. But we'd encourage you to try and get over this if you can. We'll all be rooting for you.**

Rosetti

Written a Star Letter? Contact Rosetti on 01376 550033 to claim your Rickenbacker goodie bag

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WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Dear Glitter & Ball magazine,

I've been a fan of Guano & Bats for ages, and I rarely miss an issue. Gutter & Booze is a fine source of information on music gear, and I value Grunter & Beef highly for its wit and accuracy. However, while I'm very grateful for the mention of my new book in the December 2013 issue of Gurnard & Sea Bass, I'm afraid you got its name wrong. It's not called 'Stairlift to Heaven' (though that's a pretty good gag), it's actually 'The Old Rockers' Handbook'. Any chance of a correction? My faith in Goblin & Beast magazine would be entirely restored.

Chris Maillard (author, *The Old Rockers' Handbook*) *via email*

G&B **Apologies for the oversight, Chris. And although we did publish the book cover (with the correct title) we won't try and explain it away. Good luck with the book, and if we ever get stuck for alternative titles of the magazine we'll know where to go.**

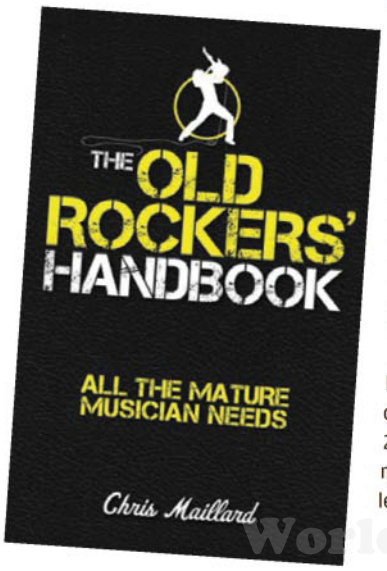
BUYING TIME

My suggested title for this? *The Ramblings of A Middle-aged Mad Man!* I am a fully paid up member of the WGC (Wrinkly Guitarists Club). I have my GAD (Guitar Acquisition Disorder) badge and have even amassed a number of MMSB (Make Me Sound Better) effects pedals. However, over the last year I have become a potential victim of WAAMS (What About A Mandolin? Syndrome).

Logistics cured me of WAAMS: mandolins are too small or my hands are too big, so I strolled through life feeling safe that I need only worry about GAD and possibly AASAD: the amp and speaker variant of GAD.

However my complacency was cruelly exposed when my girlfriend showed me a picture of an octave mandola! It was huge, dwarfing my pathetic little hands; WAAMS (oh alright: 'WAAOMS') was upon me and we planned a trip up to Denmark Street to find one with a budget of around £400.

Last Friday after visiting every shop in Tin Pan Alley I had come up short of my goal, but then I was advised to try HMS Rathbone Place... er, that's Hobgoblin Music Shop in Rathbone Place, where we headed next.



The Old Rockers' Handbook, as reviewed by *Griddle & Baste*

On entering the shop I was immediately taken with the friendly atmosphere and the signs asking customers to try the instruments.

I asked a salesmen for assistance and he was extremely helpful pointing out an Irish bouzouki as a potential answer to my needs. He showed me half a dozen chords and then told me to strum awhile while I got the feel of it. It was bang on my budget and I fell in love with it. The salesman then advised me to try other instruments to make sure that was the one I wanted; WAAMS (oh, alright, WAAIB) had got me. *Malt And Barley Blues* by McGuinness Flint was but a few hours of practise away! And it doesn't need an amp! I can sell all of mine and all of my electric guitars too (no, hang on: I'm not that mad).

I would love to say I bought it there and then but unfortunately between planning the trip and going to London I was cruelly infected with MRNBS – Made Redundant, Now Broke Syndrome.

Staying positive I have now become one of life's NUISANCES (Not Using It? Sell Anything Need Cash Extremely Speedy) as I must get my Irish bouzouki from Hobgoblin, who with their brilliant attitude I would heartily recommend to anyone seeking the joy of weird and wonderful instruments with strange tunings!

Jeff (with far too much time on his hands) *via email*

G&B **We hope you get what you wish for, sir. After all, you deserve something for introducing a few new acronyms into the guitar lexicon.**

RESOUNDING RESOLUTIONS

As I write this the Christmas ads have just hit the TV. However, given work, sorting out Christmas for family and generally spending a lot of time, effort and money on the 'festive' season, the chances of spending some quality time with my guitar are pretty low. To make myself feel better, and to get over the fact that I really should be better than I am after over two decades of playing, I'm already planning my resolutions for next year. I know it's early, but the idea of it somehow makes me feel better.

After years of having a big list of them I've decided to concentrate on just two for 2014. The first one is to get my head down and finally learn some fingerpicking after being king of the strummers for a long time (in my own head at least). I feel like I've reached an age where it suits me and it's always just seemed so damn impressive.

Bert Jansch: no finer fingerpicking inspiration

The other one is to get some kind of travel guitar – the idea is to be able to take a guitar with me wherever I go and make the most of any free time I have to dedicate it to the thing I love the most (after my family, obviously). I would just like to learn what others plan on learning for delectation. I've only written this to you, because, having stopped playing in bands a long time ago, you're the only people in my life who cares about my guitar-playing hopes and dreams. My family certainly don't give a stuff what the 'old man' gets up to.

Damian Morgan *via email*

G&B **Of course we care, Damian. And thanks for sharing it with us – we wish the best of luck with all your resolutions. Funnily enough, Phil Harris is thinking on the same lines in this month's *Hooked On Classics*. Is this a common thing for guitar players? Does the lack of time to play around Christmas mean that you spend it planning/dreaming of what you're going to achieve in the long dark nights of January? Let us know what your resolutions are and/or how successful they've been in the past. We promise not to judge you harshly at all.**

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Woke up this mornin'... NEWS

Spoilt For Choice

A sweet anniversary reissue, a duo of Collector's Choice Les Pauls, a gorgeous new signature semi-hollow and a fresh look at an icon

While the chances of us being able to afford one of Gibson Custom's lavish creations remain as slim as ever, we still love it when they roll out the big guns, if only to goggle at them.

Working from left to right in the pictures above, first we have the 1961 Les Paul Tribute SG with re-engineered 'Sideways Vibrato' and modern upgrades including Tune-O-Matic bridge, a deep nitrocellulose Heritage Cherry finish and PAF-style '57 Classic humbuckers. Second along is the first of two beautiful recreations in the Collector's Choice stable, both costing over £5000, and this one – the Collector's Choice #15 Greg Martin 1958 Les Paul – reproduces Kentucky Headhunters' Greg Martin's number one down to the finer details.

Bang in the middle is the opulent 20th Anniversary 1959 Les Paul Standard Reissue, one of Gibson's most accurate recreations to date, toasting two decades of the Historic Reissue Series. Guitar gurus Edwin Wilson and Tom Murphy were enlisted to select 100 tops for this limited run and to ensure the perfect sunburst; Murphy personally sprayed each one. The VOS process provides a timeworn feel, while Bumble Bee tone caps bring forth Clapton's revered 'woman tone'. Trimmings includes 'retro' dust cover, special toggle switch medallion, certificate of authenticity and even white gloves for respectful handling.

The fourth is the other Collector's Choice, the #16 1959 Les Paul 'Redeye' modelled on Lynyrd Skynyrd guitarist Ed King's '59 burst. Like the #15 it has 20th Anniversary Historic Specifications that include a single-layer rosewood fingerboard, a hot hide glue neck joint, historically perfect truss rod assembly, accurate colouration and custom-wound PAF reproductions.

Lastly, and slightly more affordably, Luther Dickinson's signature semi-hollow ES-335 from Gibson Memphis is an excellent option. Based on the late-'50s 335, Luther's new axe rather radically features P90 single-coils with 'dogear' covers, plus a gently reliced 'Jim Dickinson Burst' and a Bigsby. Salivate over them all at www.gibson.com.

Marshall Tardis

Marshall's Custom Shop team recently unveiled a mammoth *Dr Who*-inspired Tardis amp stack worth more than £3000 that was kindly donated for auction on eBay in aid of Children In Need's 2013 appeal. This one-of-a-kind behemoth is made up of a JVM 210H 100W all-valve head with dual-footswitchable channels, paired up with 1960A and 1960B 4X12 cabinets. The infamous science-fiction theme was created thanks to Marshall's ART technology, and blue levant vinyl provides the finishing touches. On top of the stack, the winner bags the chance to oversee the final production process. The winning bid of £4,444 secured a rocking Christmas for one lucky guitarist!

MONITOR WIZARD

IK Multimedia takes a break from its ever-growing family of music production apps with the iLoud, a canny new portable studio-quality monitor. Its Li-ion battery-fuelled speakers offer top quality frequency response, plenty of bottom end and, despite its smaller frame (around the size of an iPad) it harbours the muscle for a mighty 40W RMS punch. Clarity comes via the built-in DSP processor and bi-amped 4-driver neodymium loudspeakers and that all-important rumble will reach down to 50hz for rib-shaking power. ILoud supports bluetooth from most well-known mobile devices and has a stereo mini-jack for non-wireless mp3 players. What's more, guitarists can plug in and access effects powered by iRig circuitry. With 10hrs of battery life before a recharge is needed, the ILoud is just the ticket for on-the-move production, playback or a good old-fashioned jam session. See www.ikmultimedia.com.

Dirt Box

Seymour Duncan may well be famed for their much-lauded pickups, but they also turn out a fine stompbox or two, as exampled by their latest, rather slick piece of kit. Aside from shaming its future pedalboard comrades with a fine suit of burgundy, the new Dirty Deed Distortion pushes out a healthy grunt thanks to a pair of MOSFET transistors that emulate an overdriven tube amp and everything that it has to offer. Expect smooth overdrive through to lobe-splitting distortion operated via Gain and Level controls as well as 12dB of active EQ (and true bypass). Searing sustain and endless tweakability await. More at www.seymourduncan.com.

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SOLID DEFENCES

Fender reveals its latest delectable Pawn Shop Special Series creation in the form of the vintage-inspired Ramparte combo

Fender's newest addition to the Pawn Shop Special Series will fit tastefully next to the furniture with its textured two-tone chocolate and copper fabric covering, exclusive double-headed eagle logo badge and old-timey leather strap handle. There is, of course, a luxurious sound to match, with nine watts of all-tube power (two 12AX7 preamp tubes and one 6L6 power tube) and Class A circuitry, all directed through a single 12" Special Design speaker. Two channels are on offer – Hot and Cool – each with its own input and chickenhead volume control; Cool for smooth bluesy clean through to slightly broken tones, Hot for all-encompassing overdrive. A ¼" internal speaker disconnect is fitted for external enclosure use should players wish to upscale beyond the living room. Visit www.fender.com for a comedy demo video!

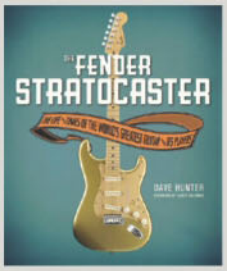
Wolves At The Door

Two handsome new electrics from EVH this month, the Wolfgang Custom Relic USA and Wolfgang Custom Deluxe USA. The Custom Relic USA (pictured) follows a vintage aesthetic with '50s style neck profile and a hand-oiled neck, heavily reliced for an authentic feel. The body, also aged, is mahogany with a shapely half-inch arched maple top and monochrome binding that adds a touch of panache. Other features include compound-radius ebony fretboard, 22 vintage-style frets, mother of pearl block inlays and a pair of direct-mount Wolfgang Zebra humbuckers with three way switch. A Floyd Rose R2 locking nut secures the tuning. The Custom Deluxe is the same bar the relic job and with a TonePros adjustable tune-o-matic-style bridge with stop tailpiece. EVH has also issued a new 5150III 100S head, cab and half stack; www.evhgear.com.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Strat Talk

Dave Hunter's latest exploration of Fender's iconic Stratocaster follows the history of the guitar from the drawing board though its evolution and offers over 30 profiles of the legendary guitarists who have made this timeless six-string their weapon of choice. Images include archival shots of players, studio photos of an array of models and memorabilia. *The Fender Stratocaster* is published by Voyageur Press and is out now.



Half And Half

Railhammer pickups introduce its new H90 humbuckers this month, evoking P90 tones with a modish half-pole, half-blade design. Versions include the Gnarly 90 Bridge and Neck with a big lower midrange and plenty of attack and the Tel 90 Bridge and Neck for a cleaner, chiming tone. Check out www.railhammer.com.

Custom Fargen

Boutique amp manufacturers Fargen Amplification has announced the launch of its Custom Shop, to include Hot Mods Do-It-Yourself kits as well as a top quality line of guitar accessories. There are 10 DIY kits and 10 transformer kits on offer with components that promise better tone detail and balance, longer sustain and a smoother overdrive with the volume down. Accessories include power cords and speaker/instrument cables. All the info is over at www.fargenamps.com.

Calendar SHOWS, GIGS, FESTIVALS, WORKSHOPS

Oli Brown UK Tour

5-15 DECEMBER

Young blues gun Oli Brown hits the road for a short run of gigs to promote his album *Here I Am*. Brown visits Bristol, Norwich, Sheffield, Brighton, Leicester, Liverpool, Newcastle, York and Southampton. A fourth album is soon to follow

WHERE? **Various venues around UK**
TICKETS **£see venues**
CONTACT **www.oliselectricblues.co.uk**

Lakeside Blues Bonanza

17 -20 JANUARY

One of the first blues festivals of the new year, Lakeside's blues fest features sets from Eddie & the Hotrods, Big Boy Bloater & the Limits, Sean Webster, Rik Martin, Chicago 9 and Five Field Holler, plus late night jam sessions

WHERE? **Lakeside, Fishery Lane, Hayling Island**
TICKETS **£179 (special weekend price)**
CONTACT **www.boogaloopromotions.com**

Broadstairs Blues Bash

21-23 FEBRUARY

This free blues festival takes place in Broadstairs and features local, national and international acts spread across 15 venues in the seaside town. Headliners include Paul Lamb & the Kingsnakes and Babajack as well as plenty more varying blues acts

WHERE? **Broadstairs, Kent**
TICKETS **Free**
CONTACT **www.broadstairsbluesbash.com**

Doncaster Blues Festival

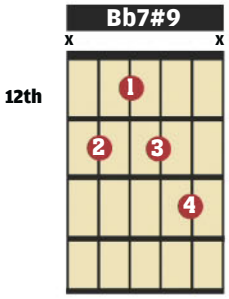
3 MARCH

Head up to Doncaster's sizeable Dome for an exceptional line up of blues artists that includes Martin Turner's Wishbone Ash, Aynsley Lister, The Nimmo Brothers, Laurence Jones, Avit Blues Band and Deja Blu

WHERE? **Doncaster Dome**
TICKETS **£14 (early bird)**
CONTACT **www.doncasterbluesfestival.co.uk**

The Lost Chord

The fingering of this simple jazzy voicing of B flat dominant seventh, sharp ninth is relatively simple, and once mastered it's a handy little chord to have in the arsenal – ideal to spice up jazz or funk progressions, as support to a hip hop vocal, or even to add flavour to those wig-out moments in rock and pop music.



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WE'VE BEEN AD...

ALL SMILES

Okay, okay, we get it, the '60s were a happy time crammed with free loving, flower power and generally positive vibes. This 1965 ad from Gretsch hammers the point home with a simple equation: guitarist + Gretsch = yet more happiness. According to them, once you've got a shiny new Gretsch, 'your music takes on a new colour' and 'the group looks and sounds better than you've ever imagined... to put out the beat of a lifetime.' All of the above may well be true, but the 'Gretsch Set', as they have named the characters on show here, are all way, way too happy. Perhaps the rather innocent bottle of undisclosed liquid has something to do with it? By the looks of the faces of the musical moptops in the background, we may be onto something... for even the fact that the stage looks no bigger than Austin Power's circular bed seems not to have quelled their enthusiasm.

New Boogie

With its popular Mini Rectifier lunchbox as inspiration, Mesa Boogie upscale for the custom-designed Recto-Verb Twenty-Five head and 1x12" combo. Both of these tube-driven amps have all the characteristics that define its Mini Rectifier cousin, but in slightly larger sizes. These portable new noiseboxes feature Multi-Watt channel-assignable power amps with Dyna-Watt technology that offers two power levels, two independent channels (each with four different 'style' modes), all-tube fully buffered FX loops, and long-spring reverb to add a little atmosphere. The vinyl-covered birch cabinets can be customised to complete a truly personalised look. See www.mesaboogie.com for all the info.

GRETSCH CENTER-BLOCK GUITARS

Gretsch expands its fortified semi-acoustic series with three drop-dead new models at an enticingly affordable pricetag

Survey Gretsch's new Center-Block trio and it's clear that looks aren't an issue; with black, rosa red and Georgia green gloss finishes and plentiful shiny metalwork, these three Electromatic offerings are as dashing as ever. You'll find no feedback or sustain problems here either, not even at high volume, thanks to the solid spruce centre block running along the length of the body. Newfangled Dual-Coil Super HiLo'Tron and Black Top Filter'Tron pickups guarantee a wide tonal palette. The single cutaway G5620T-CB, the smaller Double-Jet G5655T-CB and the full-sized double-cutaway G5622T-CB all feature five-ply maple body construction with a bound arched top and back, bound maple necks with thumbnail inlays, three-way pickup switching, G-arrow control knobs, fully-anchored Adjusto-Matic bridges and flat-handle Bigsby B50 and B70 vibratos. Both the G5620T-CB and G5622T-CB are further beautified with 'catseye' soundholes. At less than £800, prepare to be dazzled at www.gretschguitars.com.

Christmas Pedal Round-up

Looking to update the pedalboard this Christmas? Here are a few stompboxes that will fit neatly in the stocking. Up first, Tech 21 unleashes the Hot-Rod Plexi fitted with SansAmp know-how and with an extra '12AX7'-inspired preamp gain stage to proffer vintage-inspired distortion and 28dB of boost. From the legendary pedal-whizz Roger Mayer come three pioneering new units that neatly sidestep their digital counterparts. The Analogue Direct Amp+ Series, the Super 57, M59 and Bass, allow guitarists to record direct to any DAW or recording device with plenty of amp-like punch. Covering British and American guitar tones, these solidstate pedals emulate tube amps and feature a discreet analogue signal path with no latency whatsoever and an enviable dynamic range. MXR's yuletide offerings include the LA Machine, a '70s-style fuzz that offers two vintage tones controlled via the Octave knob – thick fuzz or octave-up fuzz – and the tone can be sculpted with Output, Tone and Distortion controls. Also on offer is MXR's Custom Shop Micro Amp+ with true bypass and a neat EQ to sweeten your tone and provide that all-important boost. Lastly comes Strymon's Big Sky Reverb that puts a vast menu of 12 spacious options at the fingertips with 300 fully-namable presets to build up your store, seven tone-shaping knobs, and many, many other features. Happy stomping!

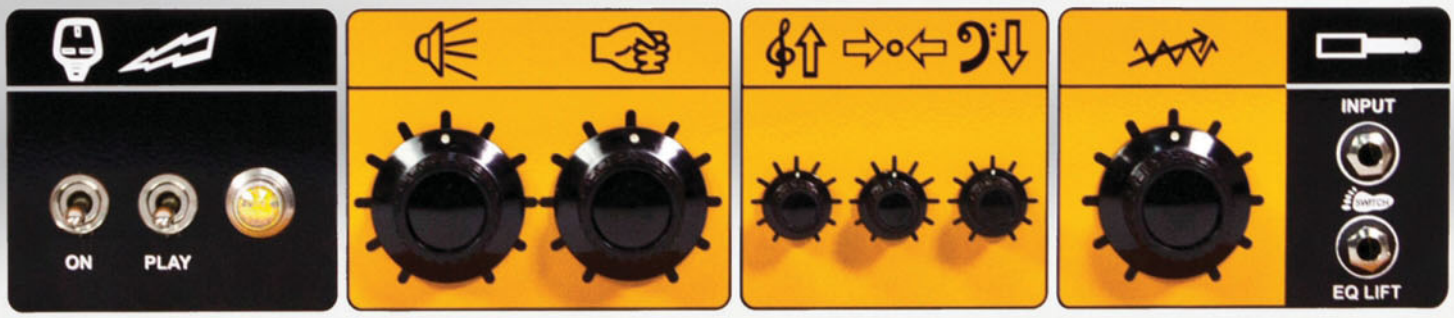
Introducing

CUSTOM SHOP 50

Handwired Perfection.

Guitar Awards 2013

Custom Shop 50



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Best Albums Of 2013

2013 had it all from foot-down blues and virtuosic jazz through to alt-folk poetry and funked up R&B flavours. Here we reveal our favourite moments...

Babajack
RUNNING MAN
R-R-R-Records

The fathom-deep atmospheres evoked by this duo's stripped down creations enchanted us at once. Becky Tate expels her demons with a passionate howl, Trevor Steger fires off Cooder-esque inflections on 'WineBox' guitars, and edgy box-drum beats stir up a fine commotion. Add the sporadic squawk of mouth organ, hairline slide and the odd bow of strings and it's high-strung finery.

David Becker Tribune
DISTANCE TRAVELED
Acoustic Music

It's all about the trio format with DBT. This album contains ample ear-room to get a handle on the incredible dexterity and musicianship at play, particularly from Becker's flighty fingerplay. Add Bolle Diekman fretless know-how and Bruce Becker's peerless stick work, and this awakens Latin-flecked landscapes with finesse. Unfussy sonics promise ambrosial listening too.

Bombino
NOMAD
Nonesuch

Tuareg Ifoghas tribesman Bombino fashions never-before-heard reverberations that embrace the blues via the layered tribal heritage of his African homeland. Fellow genius Dan Auerbach took time off from the Black Keys to help transfer Bombino's inimitable touch to record. Elemental vocals that criss-cross hypnotic rhythms and looping guitar made *Nomad* impossible to ignore.

Marcus Bonfanti
SHAKE THE WALLS
Cadiz

Primed with a well-earned British Blues Award under his belt buckle, Bonfanti's growing confidence shone through on his aptly-titled return, *Shake The Walls*. And tremble they most certainly did, with uncut Keef-inspired blues, lurching grooves, timely abandon and one mighty rumbling set of pipes. This young agitator is on the up and we can't wait to see where takes it from here.

Gary Clark Jr
BLAK AND BLU
Warner Bros

Positivity reigns supreme on this assured mix of... well, everything. Stomping R&B, fiery rock'n'roll, slick blues, hip-hop beats and jubilant soul are all well represented and glued together without a hint of trouble. Filter the lot through the mind of Clark Jr, add a smattering of brass and the result is a truly original set, packed with excitations and brimming with cool-headed promise.

Clutch
EARTH ROCKER
Weathermaker

Clutch take a nicely heavy-handed and entirely fresh approach to rock'n'roll with *Earth Rocker,* and we like the cut of their jib. Vocals right up in your grille and hard as nails are set to a mighty wall of tumultuous chording brilliance. Those partial to a headstrong, unrelenting fistful of vibey rocking will adore this, but either way, Clutch put weaker manifestos firmly back in their place.

Tommy Emmanuel & Martin Taylor
THE COLONEL & THE GOVERNOR
Mesa/Bluemoon

The Colonel And The Governor is a balanced meeting of minds, with Emmanuel's rich fingerstyle married up with Taylor's jazzy accents for a unsurpassable display of acoustic goodness. This duo take popular jazz standards to engaging new heights with frolicsome runs and the occasional 'whoop'. Taylor's originals open up new ground, too.

Andy Fairweather Low & The Lowriders
ZONE-O-TONE
Proper

Taking a break from his hectic session calendar, AFL took time to lay down *Zone-O-Tone*, an organic, sprightly and exuberant ramble through folk, blues, country and soul flavours. Armed with a flair for turning out a good tune and a personable chuckle, Fairweather takes after his name to deliver an album of easy-going bliss that'll hoist the weariest of spirits.

Gov't Mule
SHOUT!
Provogue

Gov't Mule took a pile of big-name guests and stockpiled a line up of funky blues-rock licks to bring *Shout!* to life. Colour comes from the countrified moodscape of tracks like *Forsaken Saviour* and *Captured* with its David Gilmour-inspired lead, the reggae flavours of *Scared To Live*, and the straight-up moves of cuts like *Stoop So Low* and *Funny Little Tragedy*. A decent mix.

Martin Harley
MOJO FIX
60/20

Down and dirty is always a hit at *G&B* HQ, and with Harley's delta-flecked bag of blues we filled our boots. Distorted vocals, devilish slide and boxed-in beats combine with bit-part fiddle, gritty bass and tremolo-fuelled backdrops to raise the neck hairs nicely. Harley shifts from dark lulls to uptempo flavours; add his lyrical touch and some stunning acoustic skills and it's all good.

Ben Harper and Charlie Musselwhite
GET UP!
Stax/Concord

When Harper cosied up to veteran harmonica ace Charlie Musselwhite, magic ensued. *Get Up!* explores a wider-than-usual scope for Harper, adding the upbeat stomp that Charlie thrives on to his own familiar temper. Musselwhite's dizzying harp skills are the ultimate foil to Harper's refined fretting; John Lee Hooker encouraged the meet, and we can see why.

Harry Manx
OM SUITE OHM
Dog My Cat

Clever puns aside, for his sixth album Manx continues on an ethnic folk-blues tilt, once more nestling somewhere in the ether between east and west. Clayton Doley's Hammond joins Manx's shimmering guitar and a palliative, smoky vocal invigorates the dreamscape. It's a one-of-a-kind roots music that thrives on an open plain. A fine translation of Coltrane's *A Love Supreme* is awesome too.

Lindi Ortega
TIN STAR
Last Gang

A desert-bound twang accompanies Ortega on this sultry slice of winsome Americana. With timespun lyrics of a similar ilk to those peddled by country queen Dolly Parton, Lindi weaves twilit tales of hardship, love and carefree days in Nashville and Louisiana. Art that evokes the human panorama so easily is a rarity indeed and this is infectious, free-wheelin' stuff.

Pinnick Gales Pridgen
PINNICK GALES PRIDGEN
Magna Carta

A seismic meeting of talent, Doug Pinnick (King's X), Eric Gales (Eric Gales Band) and Thomas Pridgen (Mars Volta) engaged in the heavier end of things with this fervent alt-rock missive. This new power trio mixed ingredients from spoonfuls of funk and blues to a pinch of metal and soul, and the result is Herculean. Add a growling take on *Sunshine Of Your Love* and it's instant ecstasy.

The Rides
CAN'T GET ENOUGH
Provogue

Sturdy blues from the Rides, a trio consisting of three big guns, Stephen Stills, Barry Goldberg and Kenny Wayne Shepherd. Their combined experience shines through on a passionate handful of originals, and some classic covers – the Stooges' *Search And Destroy*, Muddy Waters' *Honey Bee* and Neil Young's *Rockin' In The Free World* – are given the same enlivening treatment.

Paul Rose
DOUBLE LIFE
Mita

Rose is one damn fine guitar player and he proffers his fine array of skills on *Double Life* from startling solo movements to slick rhythm packed with feel. A classy set of tunes spreads out comfortably across soul, blues and R&B, with a soupçon of funk, and his four-strong team of vocalists match up well to the task in hand with sackfuls of passion. Virtuosity need not be pompous: this is his best so far.

Tedeschi Trucks Band
MADE UP MIND
Sony

After a faultless debut with *Revelator*, this second slice of R&B-infused blues-funk sunshine shone forth from Susan Tedeschi and Derek Trucks, who made soulful use of their 11-piece band-cum-small army of musicians that joined the husband/wife duo in the studio. Even without Trucks' jaw-dropping clout with a slide and Tedeschi's heavenly pipes, this would stand up. One for the Christmas list.

Robin Trower
ROOTS AND BRANCHES
Manhaton

When artists go for near straight-up blues – be they guitar god or otherwise – success always firmly rests on feel and feel alone, and this felt *really*, *really* good. Bountiful vibes aplenty ensure Trower's guitar playing and vocal prowess are a welcome sideshow and not the reason he turned up. Classics like *Hound Dog* and *That's Alright Mama* turn a new corner, and originals smoulder nicely.

Villagers
AWAYLAND
Domino

While he may share both a Christian name and a musical delivery largely indebted to fellow alt-folk visionary Conor Oberst of Bright Eyes, let's not take anything away from Conor O'Brien and the Villagers. This Mercury Music Award-nominated album is lyrically rich, anthemic and musically sharp without the need for a studio crammed with every instrument under our good star.

The Wave Pictures
CITY FORGIVENESS
Moshi Moshi

As tastemakers the Moshi Moshi label usually comes good and the raw, poetic indie-blues-pop sound of The Wave Pictures' new album stirred us quickly to our feet. Not simply because Dave Tattersall's unkempt guitar solos are as bonkers as they are inspired, but also because it's a 'two-fingers up to everyone' double album with 20 tunes – albeit a sunny(ish) one.

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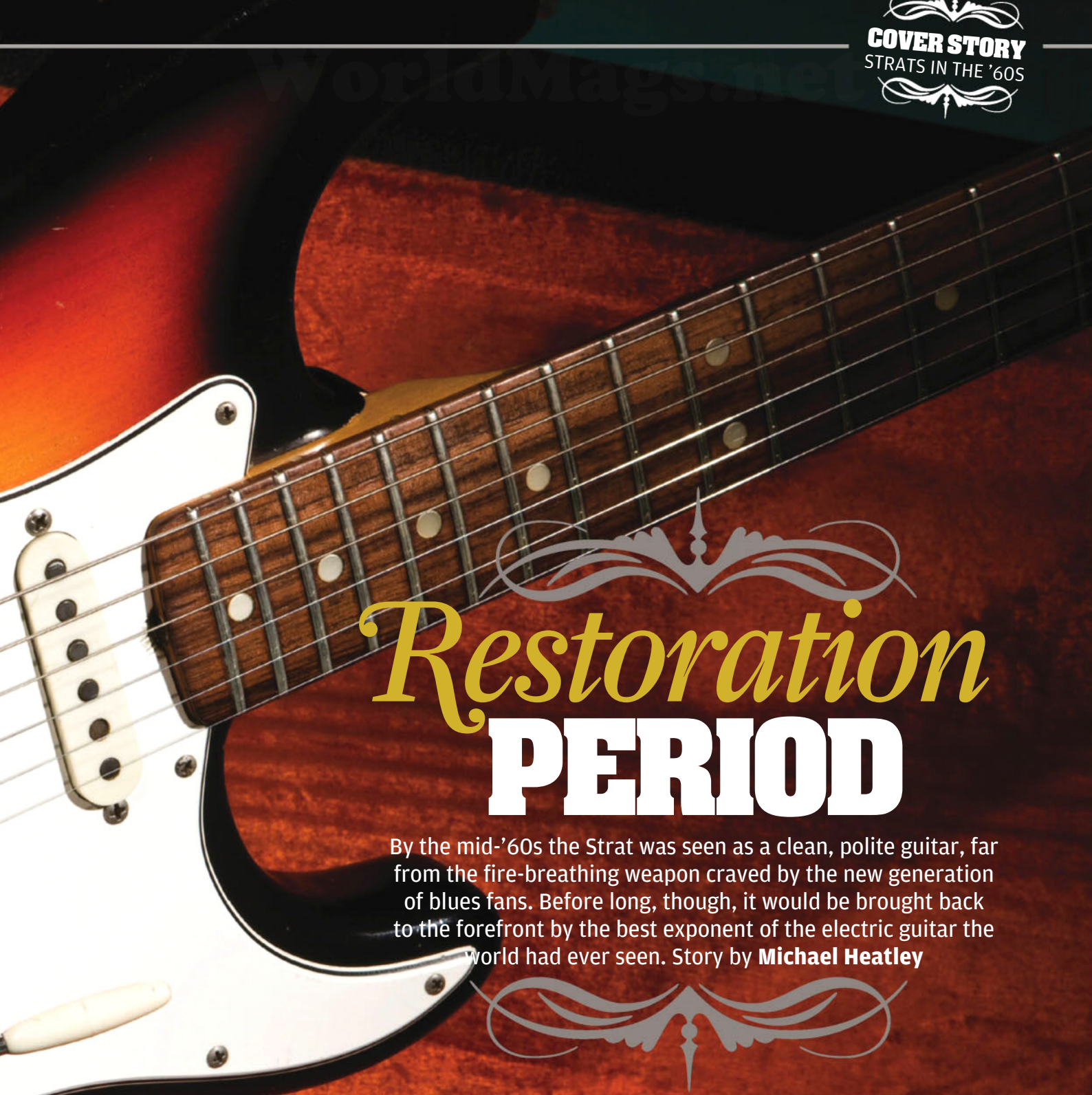
TONE
TONE



Restoration PERIOD

By the mid-'60s the Strat was seen as a clean, polite guitar, far from the fire-breathing weapon craved by the new generation of blues fans. Before long, though, it would be brought back to the forefront by the best exponent of the electric guitar the world had ever seen. Story by Michael Heatley

Born in 1953 and launched in May 1954, the Fender Stratocaster did its growing up in the '50s along with rock'n'roll. It first grabbed the limelight with bespectacled pioneers Buddy Holly and Hank Marvin, its part in the creation of music history as clear as its chiming single pickup tone. The '70s saw it in the spotlight again; Clapton made it his guitar of choice, while the likes of Ritchie Blackmore, Jeff Beck and David Gilmour took it to another level. Today it celebrates its 60th birthday as the archetypal rock guitar, the shape most recognised by non-players and the model most imitated by other manufacturers and developed by custom luthiers.

However, the 1960s, in many ways, marked a lost period for the Fender Strat. Blues-rock was essentially built on Gibson foundations, specifically the humbucker-equipped Les Paul, and the trend was for guts, grunt and distortion. It wouldn't be until Jimi Hendrix burst on the scene that the instrument threatened to lose its reputation for crystal clarity. Even then, it was by no means an instant rehabilitation; Hendrix was such a one-off players that those directly inspired by him were slow to emerge. Robin Trower, for instance, switched to playing his Fender in 1969 when Procol Harum were on tour with Jethro Tull, but would not make waves as a solo artist until the following decade.

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In 1965 custom colours were still in full swing, and the catalogue showed Strats in sonic blue and burgundy mist

In the 1960 catalogue (below) the top of the page was reserved for the fashionable offset instruments, the Jazz Bass and Jazzmaster, with the Strat relegated to second place

Rock may not yet have caught up with the potential of a twangy guitar and a Marshall, but in country and, particularly, black music, the Strat still enjoyed supremacy in the '60s. Ike Turner was very much out there during the decade, backing up Tina with his whammy-equipped Strat. Bluesman-to-be Sherman Robertson, a Turner fan, recalled it sounding 'really nice and crisp' in an era when 'everybody was using Gibsons for the sound and sustain'.

In Chicago, the up-and-coming Buddy Guy was showcasing the Strat on numbers like *First Time I Met The Blues*, while in a mellower vein, Curtis Mayfield was propelling the Impressions chartward before kicking off a solo career that would bring his wah wah-flavoured funk (Shaft, etc) to the fore. Ernie Isley just qualifies as a '60s Stratman, though he like Mayfield would find greater fame with the Isley Brothers in the following decade.

The Band's Robbie Robertson was a '60s Strat star, albeit one appreciated more by fellow players than the public at large. His instrument is all over *Music From Big Pink* and *The Band*, the two seminal late-'60s albums that practically invented the Americana genre. Rory Gallagher, another man with a reverence for musical tradition, was at that stage toting his Strat in the three-piece Taste, preparing the ground for a stratospheric solo career.

Strats were, at this point, the province of a select few. But sales of electric guitars in general were at an all-time high, the Stratocaster among them; it wasn't a case of Hendrix putting sales through the roof so much as raising the Strat's rock profile. Certainly, Fender's attempt to rival it with the Jazzmaster in 1958 and the Jaguar in 1962 had failed to completely shake its popularity.

Sales of electric guitars were at an all-time high, but it was Jimi Hendrix who raised the Stratocaster's rock profile

As an instrument, the Strat had gone through relatively few changes in the '50s, proving Leo Fender had hit the target first time out. The same of course applies to the Telecaster and Precision Bass, the designs that, along with the later Jazz Bass, were and remain the foundation stones of the company's success. But changes there were. The Strat's body had changed from ash to alder in 1956 for all but blond examples, while the one-piece maple neck with no separate fingerboard would be replaced as standard in mid-1959 by a rosewood board. Some say this offered a warmer, more mellow sound. In addition, the neck profile became flatter, resulting in what is now termed the C-shaped neck – very different to, say, 1957's sharper V.

Strats with rosewood fingerboards available to August 1962 are known as 'slabs' and are now collectable, albeit not as coveted as their '50s maple-neck predecessors. When the 'slab' neck was removed and viewed from the body end, the joint between fingerboard and neck was a straight line. The 'veneer board' that replaced it from mid-1962 was thinner, with the base cambered to match the top. The surface of the maple neck it surmounted was shaped accordingly. This change, Leo Fender's right-hand man George Fullerton suggested, was intended to increase the neck's stability in different climates.

Though no longer standard issue, maple fingerboards remained available on the Strat until 1968 as a special order. These could be distinguished from '50s instruments in

'60s Strat timeline

From slab-boards to the Hendrix era

1962 Slab board gives way to thinner veneer

1962 Neck heels receive a 'stamped' date instead of pencil

1963 Standard ceramic pancake-shaped tone capacitor introduced

1964 Fender decal on headstock changes to 'transition' style

1964 Metal spacer beneath the butterfly string guide changes to nylon

1964 'Target burst' finish introduced

1964 Clay position markers change to plastic pearl dots. Side markers change in 1965. Optional maple fingerboard offered

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Above, the 1961 slab-board olympic white Strat belonging to Glenn Tipton; below, another great '61, this one in the standard sunburst

having no 'skunk stripe' down the back of the neck; the truss rod was now inserted from the front before a separate maple board was glued to the neck. In 1969 Fender would revert to the '50s-style one-piece neck and so the 'skunk stripe' was once again seen.

The Strat's three-layer celluloid pickguard, introduced in mid-'59, was itself replaced in January 1965; celluloid (also known as nitrate) guards were not only flammable but had a tendency to shrink. They can be identified visually from their vinyl/ABS successors by their greenish tinge. In the late '60s, white Strat pickguards changed further when the bottom layer (not usually visible) became pearloid. Changes were afoot behind the pickguard, too; wire with shielding made of cotton gave way in 1968 to PVC plastic.

Pickup-wise, the mid-'60s saw the beginning of a gradual slide in output from 6k to 5.7k or less, while 1963 saw the introduction of a standard ceramic pancake-shaped tone capacitor. The latter year also saw the Tolex case material change to white with black leather ends instead of brown Tolex and brown leather ends, as used from 1959 to 1962.

The standard finish of the '60s Strat was three-tone sunburst, and mid-1964 saw Fender change the way they created this. The yellow element of the sunburst had previously been stained into the wood before the painting process, leaving Fender to spray the remaining two colours, red and brown, onto it. The change to spraying yellow rather than staining it made the finish markedly less transparent, and allowed Fender to use alder with minor defects such as mineral stains because it didn't show as much wood grain. This is called a 'target burst'.

Custom colours based on the Dupont range of auto paints had debuted on the cover of the '59 catalogue in the shape of a fiesta red Strat and came into their own in the '60s. Rare finishes like shoreline gold and burgundy mist fetch higher prices on today's collectors market than the ubiquitous candy apple red and olympic white.

The year of 1965 saw changes – shoreline gold was replaced by firemist gold and Inca silver by firemist silver – but the number of options remained at 14. The 1969 list price of a custom colour Strat was $367, inclusive of a five per cent premium, while the occasionally seen option of a matching headstock increased price (and collectability) yet again.

Leo Fender had run his company in hands-on fashion until 1965 when, after a bout of ill-health, he sold it to CBS for a reported $13 million. Fear soon spread that instruments made under the aegis of such a large conglomerate would not match up to Fender's previous standards. The term ➔

1965 Celluloid (nitrate) pickguard replaced by vinyl/ABS

1965 Headstock enlarged late in this year

1965 L-series serial number format on the neck plate gives way to the F-series

1966 Rosewood fingerboards change from Brazilian to Indian

1967 Logo changes again to black with model name in large capital letters

1967 Kluson tuners give way to branded 'F' stamped items. Tuner buttons are now chrome-plated plastic

1967 Polyurethane replaces nitro-cellulose finish

1968 Cloth shielding on wiring replaced by plastic

1969 One-piece maple neck reintroduced

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Hendrix and '60s Strats

Jimi Hendrix considered the Fender Stratocaster to be 'the best all-round guitar for the stuff we're doing'. He liked the 'very bright trebles and the deep bass sounds' he could achieve on an instrument – and, crucially, the double cutaway made it southpaw-friendly when flipped.

The first Strat Hendrix played entered the country with him in September 1966. It was carried through Heathrow by a roadie since, as Jimi, a visitor, was officially unable to work. The instrument had been purchased that May from Manny's Music in New York, with funds supplied by his then-girlfriend Carol Shiroky. Jeff Baxter, later of Steely Dan, was an assistant at the shop and claims Jimi part-exchanged a Fender Duo-Sonic for it.

The white Stratocaster with a rosewood neck looked 'played in' when Jimi was first pictured with it at London's Bag O'Nails club in November 1966. The tip of the pickup selector switch had been lost, while body damage presumably caused by a previous owner may have been added to by the rings, bangles and other jewellery Jimi was fond of wearing. By January of 1967 a sunburst Stratocaster seemed to have become his main instrument and remained so for the next six months or so: what happened to that first white original is unknown.

Even then, Hendrix believed fans of vintage guitars were fooling themselves that their instruments were superior: 'Everybody's screaming about the seven year-old Telecaster and the 12 year-old Gibson and the 92 year-old Les Paul... the guitars nowadays play just as good.' His attitude towards instruments was that they were simply tools of the trade, and few guitars, his first Strat included, would be treated with tender loving care or retained once their usefulness had ended.

His most famous Strat of all was the white maple-neck example played at Woodstock in August 1969. Acquired the previous November, it featured a maple neck with a separate fingerboard and a combination of larger headstock and large logo typical of the period. It passed into the possession of Mitch Mitchell, who auctioned it at Sotheby's on 25 April 1990, and it is now owned by Experience Music Project.

Another maple-necked favourite was 'Black Beauty', purchased in October of 1968 just a month before the 'Woodstock Strat'. Hendrix used this guitar for his final European tour, and after that it eventually entered the possession of Uli Jon Roth, former guitarist of the Scorpions, via Monika Danneman, with whom he enjoyed a 20-year relationship that ended only with her death in 1996.

Phil Harris advises that 'If I wanted to buy a Stratocaster that gave me all the proper Hendrix appointments but be as old as possible, the first one with the "right" pickups would be one with a non-nitrate guard. But I'd want a small headstock, so I'd get a '65. That ticks all the boxes. It sounds like a '68 which is "the" Hendrix Strat, but it looks – and is – a pre-CBS Strat. Just...'

In the early days only operations like cutting fret slots had been done by machines, but CBS looked for ways to cut time and costs

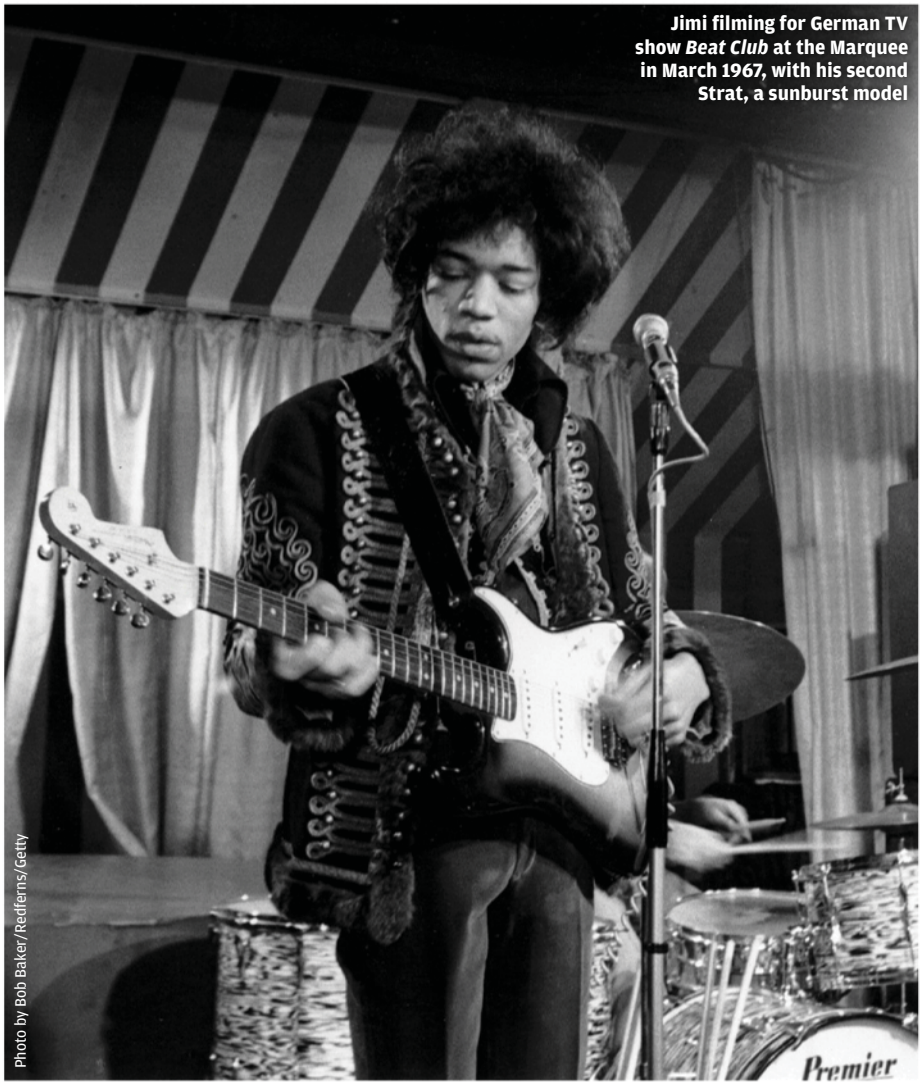
'pre-CBS' has since been used to justify the premium prices of instruments made before the takeover date.

The 18 months from late summer 1964 to December 1965 is known as the 'transition' era when more mass-production techniques started to take hold, and guitars made between these date are the least collectable pre-CBS Strats. The Strat had not been a product of automation in the early days; only operations like cutting slots for frets had been performed by dedicated machines. But CBS looked for ways to cut production time and costs. When CBS took over Fender, according to sales manager Don Randall, the company was producing 1,500 instruments a week, a good proportion of which were Strats. That compared with the 40 per week output of just a decade earlier.

By 1966, Fender had a new factory of some 120,000 square feet (1,115 square metres) operating next to the existing factory at Fullerton. And while semi-acoustics, banjos, keyboards and solid-state amplification were among the product lines being added to the catalogue by a management ever eager for the 'leisure dollar', the Strat was still a mainstay.

The year of 1966 brought changes, not only in methods of production but also in the shape of the Strat. The most obvious change was the increased size of the headstock from late 1965, supposedly to counteract warping, and this change would remain as standard through the '60s and '70s. The necks of Strats of the period tended towards a 'U' shape considered unattractive by many.

At the same time the style of Fender logo changed. The thin 'spaghetti' Fender of 1954 ↦



Jimi filming for German TV show *Beat Club* at the Marquee in March 1967, with his second Strat, a sunburst model

Photo by Bob Baker/Redferns/Getty

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Above: a blue 1964 Strat with green guard and 'transition' logo. Below: a '68 model with optional maple fretboard and large headstock

By the end of the '60s Strats were a bargain buy. A pre-CBS rosewood-neck Strat might fetch $300-$400, a new example a little more

had been supplanted by a larger gold logo in the autumn of 1964. The thicker 'black' logo that appeared in 1967 was intended to be more recognisable on TV and would last to 1980. Surprisingly, it wasn't until 1967 that Fender registered their logo and 'letter F' as trademarks, so the name would be accompanied by a capital R in a circle (the registered trademark sign) from then on.

The use of nitrocellulose lacquer was largely phased out by 1967, making the crazed patina beloved by vintage guitar enthusiasts a thing of the past. It was replaced by a glossy 'thick skin' finish, which was reckoned to cover the wood with up to 15 layers of polyester as opposed to the three thin layers of lacquer. As with most changes, this did not find universal favour among guitarists.

Meanwhile the Strat's body became markedly less contoured, adding to the feeling that the instrument was somehow being 'watered down'. In truth there weren't enough people at the top who cared about its reputation and its legacy, and this led to a spate of departures; men who made Fender, like Forrest White, George Fullerton and Don Randall, quit for pastures new, while Leo himself was banned from competing for five years – by which time his health issues had been resolved.

So did the changes make the '60s Strat a better or worse instrument? According to *G&B* columnist Phil Harris, 'It made it different. A 1966 Strat has a slimmer neck and it's got a larger headstock. All Fender instruments, not just the Strat, went through some changes with the CBS corporate takeover. They were upgrading the range – at least that's what they thought they were doing at the time; they were actually downgrading them, in a way.

'They did make some good instruments, though. In the '70s I had a '58 Strat with a maple neck and a friend of mine had a '66. I would quite often nick his '66 and use it on stage. My '58 was very twangy and the '66 had the latest design pickups, which basically hit you right between the eyes like a howitzer. It was like a caricature of the earlier Strats, and a lot more powerful.'

As far as the Strat in Britain went, the lifting of the trade embargo saw Hank Marvin's salmon pink six-string joined by more examples as the '60s progressed. Jennings, the first official distributor of Fender in the UK, had been supplemented by Selmer in 1962, but both were replaced by Arbiter, who began a near four-decade tenure in 1965. 'Because we didn't get '50s Strats in England,' Phil Harris explains, 'the real English Strat, the one that hits you right in the spinal cord, is from 1961 to early '64 – that's the one that made all those noises and did thousands of songs we love.'

Western Europe was Fender's biggest export market, but the Strat's impact might have been even greater had one of the Beatles or Stones been identified with it. Not until George Harrison had his blue Strat refinished in psychedelic hues for 1967's *Magical Mystery Tour* movie were Britain's most famous group publicly associated with the instrument. George's Strat had, in fact, first featured on 1965's *Rubber Soul* when roadie Mal Evans was dispatched to buy one for him and another for John Lennon; the pair played them in unison on the solo of *Nowhere Man*. But while George toted a rosewood Tele in *Let It Be*, and Fender Rhodes pianos were also seen on camera, the Fender/Fab Four interface was to remain decidedly limited.

By the end of the '60s Strats were a bargain buy – a pre-CBS rosewood-neck Strat might fetch between $300 and $400, a new example little more. Eric Clapton found a rack of vintage Fenders, priced in the low hundreds ➔

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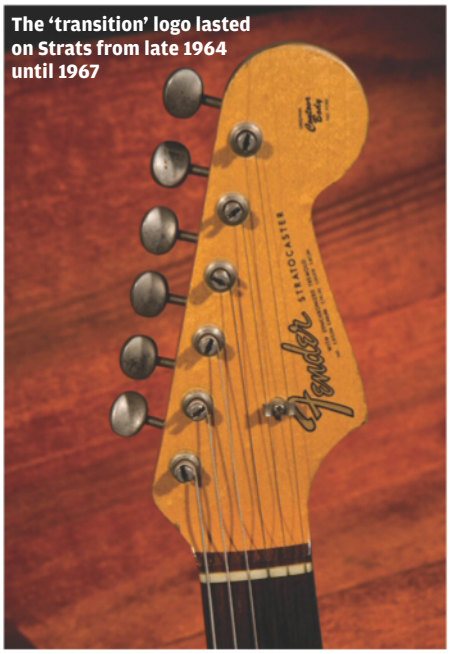
of dollars to reflect their unfashionability, in the Sho-Bud guitar shop in Nashville, Tennessee, a 1970 tour stop with Derek and the Dominos. 'They were going for virtually nothing because they were so unwanted, so I bought a big pile of them for a song.' Sharing his good fortune, he gave Steve Winwood one, Pete Townshend another, George Harrison a third and kept the rest.

Changes made to the Strat in 1971, taking the truss rod adjustment to the headstock end of the neck and introducing a separate string guide for the middle pair of strings, have come to characterise an undesirable instrument. The four-bolt neck plate present since 1950 was replaced at the same time by a three-screw design featuring a neck tilt adjuster, and this was particularly displeasing to purists, as Phil Harris explains. 'Walter Trout and Ritchie Blackmore speak very highly of bullet truss rod Strats, but my opinion is how much of the neck is touching the body? There isn't that body-neck joint.'

So if the Strat had remained essentially unchanged in the '60s, the omens weren't looking so bright in the new decade. The guitar sales boom is reckoned to have peaked in 1972, and at that point it's probably safe to say Fender were producing more average Strats than exceptional ones.

But many still swear by '60s Strats. Phil Harris, who's owned Starts of all hues, has a stripped and refinished '63; 'I wouldn't hire it to Jimi if he came back from the grave 'cos it's so personal to me. It's well used, it's been refretted, I've had to fill the pickguard and add a piece to the bottom horn where it's shrunk. The back of the neck is so filthy the previous owner must have been a miner. It plays like a demon and I love it so much. It's not about originality, it's something you can't see or taste – but Leo is in there somewhere!'



The 'transition' logo lasted on Strats from late 1964 until 1967

ICONIC '60S STRATS AND THE PLAYERS WHO MADE THEM FAMOUS

The Strat's changing fortunes have been artist-driven. Here are six important ones...

BONNIE RAITT

Bonnie's famous Strat, bought for a bargain $120 in 1969, matches a '65 body and a later neck that's 'thinner and fits my hands better'. Tuned to open A for slide work, it has featured in every performance she has made since she acquired it. Her other tour mainstays are three signature Strats from the Fender Custom Shop and a '63 sunburst that used to be owned by Robin Trower with Seymour Duncan pickups. She also packs a Gibson ES-175 semi – but, for Bonnie, 'Nobody made a better guitar than a Stratocaster, and nobody ever will.'

MARK KNOPFLER

Knopfler's main squeezes in the early Dire Straits days were both of similar vintage, a '60 refinished in red with a maple board (he no longer owns this) and a '61 with a rosewood fingerboard. Also repainted in red in emulation of Hank Marvin, and at one point fitted with a DiMarzio Fat Strat pickup, this was responsible for the riff on *Sultans Of Swing*. 'Hendrix relaunched the Strat in the '60s and Knopfler did the same in the '80s,' says Phil Harris, who had the pleasure of restoring the '61. 'It was a bit of a wreck, but Mark still has it. It's still a major part of his collection.'

ROBERT CRAY

Robert ditched his Gibson SG and ES-345 for a Strat after seeing Phil Guy, Buddy's brother, in 1979: 'He was playing through a Fender Super Reverb amp, and I loved his tone.' A Cray favourite is a green instrument from 1964 with a rosewood board, and when he came to design his signature model he chose a neck radius between this and a maple '58. He now takes three Custom Shop examples of different hues on tour, retiring the precious originals. The non-tremolo ('hard tail') configuration comes from wedging the '64's tremolo block; he never uses what he dismissively calls the 'swizzle stick', and dislikes the fact a string break can cause a Strat tuning problems.

RORY GALLAGHER

The late, great Rory's 1961 Stratocaster was reputedly the first in Ireland, and was bought for under £100 at the now defunct Crowley's Music Store in Cork. The guitar was extensively modified over the years with five Sperzel tuners and one Gotoh, a replacement nut, a new scratchplate (changed during his time with Taste) and new pickups. Gallagher disconnected the bottom tone pot and rewired his guitar for master tone and volume, also installing a five-way selector switch. A 'hump' in the scratchplate moved the neck pickup closer to the neck on the bass side, while one of the clay dot inlays at the 12th fret fell out and was replaced with a whiter plastic one. Add a sunburst finish 'weathered' from the sweat of literally hundreds of gigs and you have a Stratocaster in a million.

Rory Gallagher's '61 was sold to him by a showband player who wanted a red one

RITCHIE BLACKMORE

The Deep Purple axemeister bought a stock black-finish maple-neck Stratocaster in 1969, using it in tandem with his Gibson ES-335 for a year. In 1970 the Gibson disappeared from the stage. By *Deep Purple in Rock* this black 1968 Strat ruled in the studio too, until it was replaced by an identical (but rosewood board) model midway through 1972. The ES-335 was not forgotten, though; when the Strat's frets wore out they were replaced by Gibson jumbo frets. 'Blackers', who has since been seen with bullet truss rod '70s Strats, is rarely witnessed playing electric guitar at all these days, but he remains indelibly linked with the axe that made his reputation thanks to *Smoke On The Water* and many others.

ERIC CLAPTON

The 1965 sunburst known as 'Brownie', was the very first Strat Eric ever bought back in 1967. It was used on both the *Layla* album he cut with Derek and the Dominos (it also appears on the back cover) and his solo debut, 1970's *Eric Clapton*. It was quickly eclipsed by 'Blackie', a '50s neck and body hybrid, but Clapton didn't junk his old favourite and took it on tour with him through to 1985. 'Brownie' finally went under the hammer in New York in 1999, raising an astounding $497,500 for the Crossroads Centre drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre which Eric founded in Antigua.

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Mountain Man

Still a giant of guitar with a huge voice to match, Leslie West is back with fine new album *Still Climbing*, with a host of well-chosen musical friends in tow. Interview by **Steve Bailey**

Nothing, it seems, can keep Leslie West down. He has endured many years of substance addiction and countless career dips and troughs, not to mention bladder cancer... and, to cap it all, in June 2011 an emergency life-saving operation due to diabetes complications meant the amputation of his right leg above the knee. 'Hey, thank God it wasn't my arm, you know?' West drawls in his distinctive New Jersey accent, sounding for all the world like some irrepressible character out of a Martin Scorsese movie. 'You and I would not be having this conversation right now.'

In those first weeks Leslie feared he'd never find the will to perform again. Wheelchair-bound, he bravely fulfilled his promise to play at the Rock'n'roll Fantasy Camp in New York barely a month after the operation. It was a pivotal moment and an inspiring one, and by February 2012 West was back on stage to play a full set to an adoring reception.

'As soon as I heard the sound of my guitar on stage again I knew I had to carry on. One of the songs, *Tales Of Woe,* speaks for itself. It's not a pity party, but man, it's a life changer, I'll tell you that.'

The road to a full recovery is being tackled with the steely grit and determination of a true survivor. 'My main problem is I can't get used to that prosthetic leg because my balance is so off,' West confides. 'At rehab they made me strap the guitar on and then put me on parallel bars to see how long can I stand with the guitar. The most I can do is 40 seconds, so that wouldn't be much good for the stage. I don't want to worry about falling on my ass! I have an electronic chair, but there's not much moving around I can do. We're getting it down slowly but surely.'

West's first solo album, 1969's *Mountain,* was born with the help of ex-Cream collaborator and bassist Felix Pappalardi. The title embodied the West's immense presence and playing so completely that it almost inevitably became the name of the band. With keyboardist Steve Knight and drummer Corky Laing, Mountain was there at the forefront of the original vanguard of heavy rock, appearing at Woodstock and producing a stone cold classic of the genre in *Mississippi Queen*.

New album *Still Climbing* references Mountain's classic debut 1970 *Climbing!* LP, and it's a triumph of fortitude over adversity. 'I've been dying since the day I was born,' growls West over a pulverising riff on the opening track, and the effect is completely life-affirming. In fact West counts this work as perhaps the heaviest he's ever made. Jonny Lang, Mark Tremonti and Johnny Winter all contribute, while West's own distinctive fretwork is on fire from the first volley of his trademark vibrato.

Recording was taken slowly to allow West to feel his way back into the process. Co-producer, friend and confidant Mike 'Metal' Goldberg played drums while Leslie laid down guitar tracks. The album was started in June 2012 and took a year in total to complete. 'There's something to be said for doing it nice and slow,' Leslie recommends. 'Record companies used to scream at you, "You gotta get this album in two months!", and then you become redundant playing solos, and things start running into each other, so this worked out well. Johnny Lang came into the studio and we sat in the control room nose to nose and played two feet away from each other. My God, the sound of his voice... we did *When A Man Loves A Woman*.

Gear

Guitars

Dean Leslie West signature guitars, Dean Flying V, Larrivee acoustic. With Mountain in the '70s West played a 1956 single cutaway Les Paul Junior and a late '50s double cutaway Junior

Amps

Currently Blackstar; with Mountain West used a Sunn Coliseum PA head, Marshalls and later on Stramp

Effects

TC Electronics delay, Jim Dunlop Crybaby Slash signature wah, octave pedal

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West only uses the first and third fingers to fret, with the middle finger only coming into play to hold down the occasional chord

Listen up

LESLIE WEST
Still Climbing
(2013)
Despite all his recent difficulties the new album is a blast, trumping 2011's *Unusual Suspects* and finding West's guitar playing and indeed his vocals stronger than they've been perhaps even since the '70s

MOUNTAIN
Climbing!
(1970)
Back in 1970 this album shot West into guitar hero status on a par with all the incredible players of that era. *Theme From an Imaginary Western* and *Mississippi Queen* are the enduring cuts

He's something else, that's all I can say. His playing is great, too. He doesn't use a pick, and our styles complement each other. I do all the solos in the control room with my cabinets out in the studio; it's easy for me because when Metal is sitting right next to me, he can just tell me when to do another one.'

Another cover, *Feeling Good*, sees Twisted Sister's Dee Snider duetting with West, while *Dying Since The Day I Was Born* features some steaming riffage from Alter Bridge's Mark Tremonti. 'I got to pick the guys I wanted to play with. Just throwing superstars on an album doesn't necessarily mean it's going to come out sounding great. I couldn't be more thrilled with the way it turned out. I wanted to be impressed with the album. If I'm not impressed, how can I expect any one else to be?'

> *'Just throwing superstars on an album doesn't mean it's going to come out great'*

Leslie's wife Jenni also made a telling contribution to the album. 'I'd wake up in the morning and all of a sudden I'd see that on my iPad via the cloud there would be some lyrics. I'm looking at it thinking, where the fuck did this come from?! I didn't want to work with my wife because my former partner Felix Pappalardi worked with his wife, and she shot him! I wouldn't have recommended it but, you know what... it just worked out. Some of her lyrics were great. She's become my primary songwriting collaborator.'

Longtime friend Johnny Winter turned in some blistering slide playing on the West-penned *Busted, Disgusted Or Dead*, and the bond between the two guitar legends is a strong one. 'His slide playing and my slide playing are very different, so you really can hear Johnny when he comes in. Metal went to Connecticut to record him and he almost had to trick Johnny into doing a few more passes because he thought he'd nailed it first time. I picked the best parts and it sounds like we were doing it right then and there in the room together.'

Famous for playing a Les Paul Jr in his early days, Leslie now plays three Dean signature guitars designed with the Junior as the starting point. The USA model is made in the Dean custom shop, the Standard model is made in Korea, and the budget Mississippi Queen version is Chinese. 'The great thing is, from the most expensive to the least expensive, all of them play exactly the same,' West insists. 'They all have a slightly different sound but, I tell you, they all play equally well. The neck is shaped like a V and it slots in my hand so perfectly, and we worked a lot on the shape of the body. I really take pride in those guitars.'

West takes most satisfaction in the quality of his Leslie West DMT Mountain Of Tone pickups. 'The P90 single coil pickups were so fucking loud and noisy, so with my pickup we wanted to design a humbucker to sound like those old P90s and have all the same facilities. I think we accomplished that.'

Dean also made West a Flying V which has been designated as his slide guitar. 'I raise the action up way high on it and use open D and regular tuning. There's a lot of guys who play in open G tuning, but sometimes I just drop the fat E and the thin E to D and I play just in that tuning. My God, it sounds huge!'

Leslie plugs straight into his 100W Blackstar head and says he has no need for any extra crunch. 'A pedal comes with the amp; there's a clean button, there's a fatter warmer button, there's a button with little drive, and then there's real holy-shit drive. That's all I need. I have a TC Electronics delay, a Slash Wah and an ➔

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Leslie takes enormous pride in his Dean signature guitars

octave pedal on a little table next to me and I use my foot for the amp buttons. We had to figure out a whole new way.'

When it comes to tone everyone wants to know how he achieved the high-octane attack on *Mississippi Queen* and the Mountain *Climbing!* album. Back then Leslie played a Les Paul Junior through a very odd amp. Mountain's very first gig was at the Filmore West in San Francisco opening for Johnny Winter and Albert King, and West was awaiting delivery of his new Marshalls.

'They delivered these cartons to the hotel. I opened them up and I saw these Sunn amps. I thought "Sunn? What the hell is that?" It wasn't even a guitar amp – it was called a Coliseum PA amp. It looked like a guitar head but it was for microphones, it had these big transformers and huge KT88 tubes and there were two 4x12" cabinets with Eminence speakers. I had no choice but to use it. There was a master and four inputs for microphones around the back, so I put the jack from the guitar into one of the microphone slots. I turned up the gain, and holy shit, that was my sound. Guys ask me all the time how I got that sound. Albert King's amp blew that night, so he used the Sunn. Man, he didn't know what to do with it!'

West switched back to Marshalls for the 1971 *Nantucket Sleighride* album then later moved on to Stramp amps made in Germany, but it's that towering Sunn tone that first made his name. 'You can still find those amps, and when I do I grab them because there was something unique about it. I don't know how or why it worked like that, but it made sense to me. Sunn wanted to make a guitar amp so I said, just put it in a new case that says "Coliseum guitar head" – but they fucked it up. They tried to change this, change that. I said, my God, you had it already.'

It's not just the gear that makes Leslie's sound unique; his technique is rather unorthodox too. 'I only play with two fingers,' West states. 'I use the first and third fingers and totally ignore the middle one. I didn't learn the guitar properly. I had to compensate but I learned how to use those two fingers like lightening. Sometimes the middle finger will help press down the chord, but I don't use it for anything else. My pinky has arthritis, it's so useless.'

Ask the man how he gets his legendary vibrato and he has a stock and slightly off-colour explanation. 'Look, it's like masturbating. Whatever you do when you masturbate with your left hand, that's how I do it. I bend a string, put it into vibrato, I don't play fast, but when you bend it you have to bring it back to its original position. Some guitar players just stretch it and then end the vibrato where it's stretched, but that's not the note. It's like an opera singer, it starts slow, it doesn't go immediately like some players do.

'I learned by watching Albert King. I said, I'm gonna learn how to stretch the strings as much as Albert. I didn't realise that he turned his guitar upside down so that the thin E was where the fat one would be, and he pulled down on it – his hands were massive. I stretched the shit outta those strings. I had to get them as far as they would go. That helped my vibrato. I owe a lot to Albert King. He's my favourite of all those blues guys, he was the man. He had one lick and he used it every which way but loose. The funny thing is, if I had walked up and looked at the stringing of his guitar I would have said "Oh, my God, it's backwards." But I didn't, and so that's how I got my vibrato.'

"I owe a lot to Albert King. He had one lick and he used it every which way but loose'

West is also quick to credit top US session player and Stevie Nicks sidemen Waddy Wachtel. 'We grew up together in the same building in New York and he really taught me how to play the electric guitar. I lived on one side of the building and you had to go all the way down to the bottom and take the elevator back up on the other side to get to his apartment. When the Beatles first came out I'd hear their songs on the radio and I'd run over to his place so he could show me how to play something. By the time I got over there he'd already worked out how to play it. He was incredible.'

Even now, almost 50 years on, and despite everything, Leslie West is still enthralled by the sound of the electric guitar. He reveals it's that and the love of his wife Jenni that keeps him alive. 'It's about getting through the day, doing the small things, and trying to be normal now. I feel good when I have a guitar in my hands. If could play guitar all the time, then everything would be just fine.'

And Another Thing...

Leslie first learnt to play on the ukulele and then graduated to a four-string Stella tenor guitar bought for him by his grandad. He didn't get to grips with a six-string guitar until his early teens

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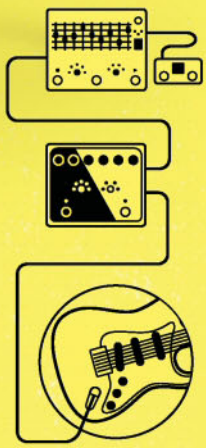

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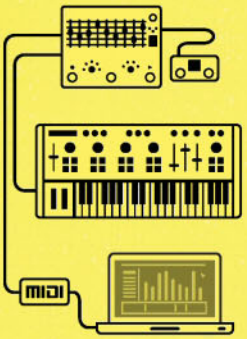

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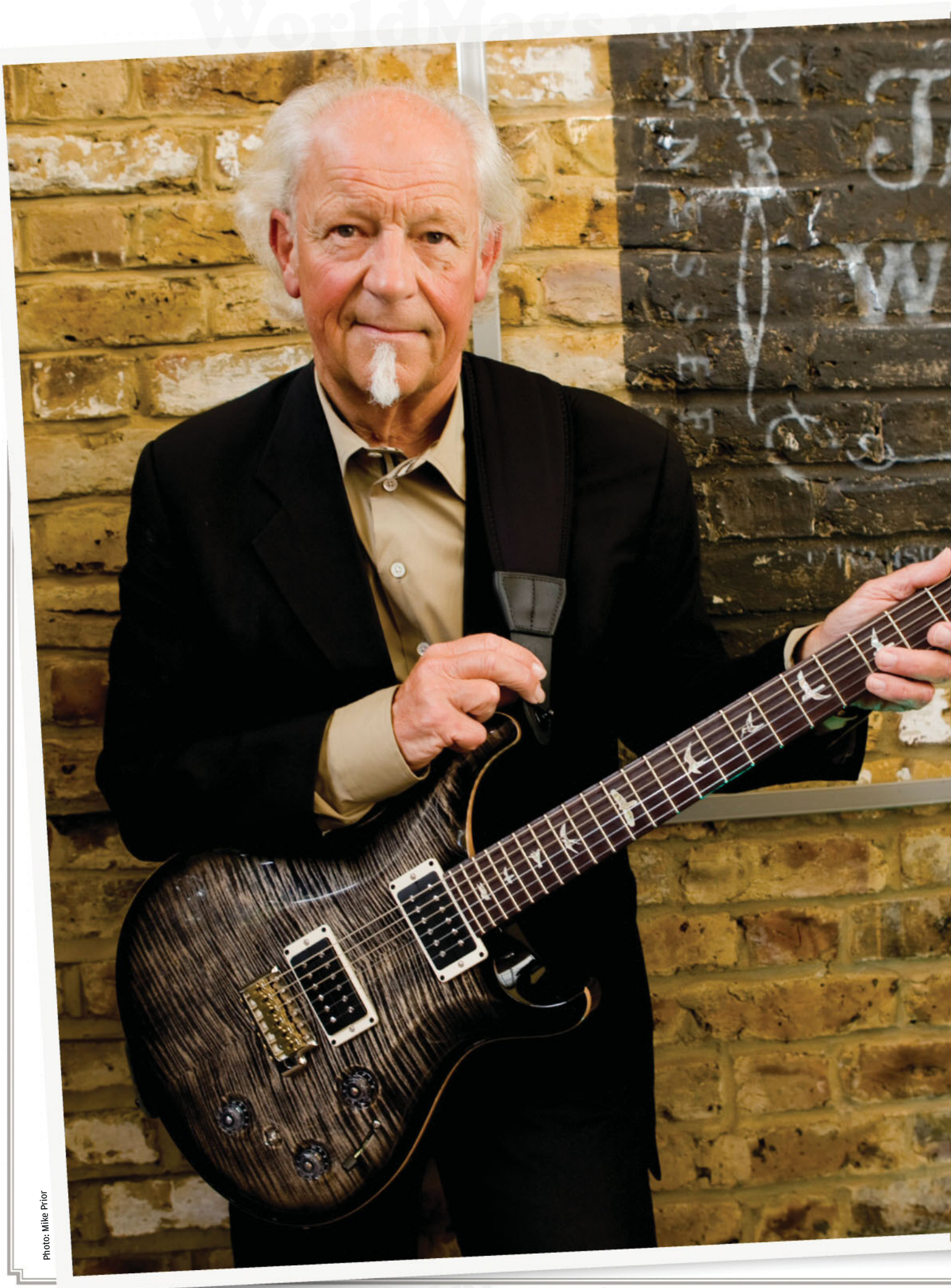

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More than Words

Martin Barre's latest project revisits melodic Jethro Tull material and cleverly balances it with his own acoustic-based compositions. Interview by **Rik Flynn**

Despite sharing a lucrative musical partnership with the Pied Piper of prog Ian Anderson, Jethro Tull's lead guitarist Martin Lancelot Barre has always remained somewhat in the shadow of his eccentric collaborator. Unlike many of his heroic axe-wielding peers, Barre lets his guitar do all the talking. He's humble, sincere and more than a little unwilling to accept his own influence on the generations of guitarists that studied his every move. With a pervasive playing style that incorporates the best of blues, rock, folk, baroque and classical strains, he set a fine example.

'I always think influential guitarists are people like Steve Vai, Robin Ford, Scott Henderson and Gary Moore,' he offers. 'It's wonderful to think I'm considered like that, but I never see myself in that category – the iconic guitar hero isn't me.'

Considering that Barre began his musical journey in at the deepest of deep ends by opening for the very best, it may be surprising to learn that – unlike a fair proportion of the legendary guitarists we've had the pleasure to encounter – there's no exuberant rock star aura to speak of here, and certainly no sunglasses. He may be devoid of ego but he's laden with charm, and despite his wise decision to keep the chest hair under wraps and tone down the wardrobe, Barre still has his head above ground when it comes to music. With Jethro Tull on indefinite hiatus he has once again decided to go it alone for his latest opus, the cleverly-titled *Away With Words*, an acoustic album that weaves his favourite lesser-known Tull songs with his own complementary compositions – but more of that later.

Anderson and his infamous flute may have defined the Jethro Tull sound to some degree and the frontman may have enjoyed much of the limelight, but Barre's role is not to be underestimated. Take, for example, the title track of Tull's classic album *Aqualung*, which contains one of progressive rock's most well-known guitar passages. 'It's hilarious! Ian eternally regretted not having a flute solo on it,' Barre chuckles. 'It's the biggest piece of music in Jethro Tull's catalogue, and it doesn't have any flute. Brilliant! That solo was completely improvised... but luckily it went well.'

When original Jethro Tull guitarist Mick Abrahams left in the late '60s to follow a more bluesy direction, Barre became his replacement, despite suffering crushing nerves. If folklore is to be believed he hardly played a note in the audition, and didn't even bring an amp or a cable to his second session. 'I was petrified, but it was a good way to start,' he recalls. 'I'll never be anything but apprehensive about everything I do in music, but I think it's a better way to be because you've got to try hard, you've got to really practice, you've got to really know what you're doing.'

If you survey the bills on which Martin Barre soon found himself, you could understand anyone having a case of the willies. 'Within the first six months of joining, I was on tour with Jimi Hendrix,' he recounts. 'For me to be playing before Jimi Hendrix... I was terrified. He was very ➔

Gear

Guitars
PRS 513, PRS McCarty semi-solid, PRS Modern Eagle Quatro, PRS Singlecut, PRS acoustic/electric, Taylor acoustics, 1954 Gibson mandolin. Previously used: Gibson, Schecter, Hamer, Ibanez, Tom Anderson and Manson

Amps
Two Soldano Decatone heads with Marshall 2x12" cabs

Effects
Alesis Picoverb reverb, Line 6 radio transmitters

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Martin uses a PRS P22 piezo-bridge electric, with a Modern Eagle Quatro as a backup

Photo: Mike Prior

nice, which helped... but then we played with Zappa, Led Zeppelin and Jeff Beck – every guitar hero!'

A tour opening for Led Zeppelin proved to be Jethro Tull's big break, and thankfully Barre's nerves had subsided a little by then. 'I was a bit less terrified,' he allows. 'It was wild because Led Zeppelin were just mad, crazy rock'n'roll, and we sat on the sidelines with our jaws on the ground. They were amazing in what they were doing... and not just musically. We literally had the front six feet of the stage to set up and about half an hour to go on and deliver everything we had.'

'I fiercely ignored guitar players for years. I just went wherever I wanted to'

Brand Loyalty

Martin uses a combination of guitars old and new. 'Paul Hamer used to sell me vintage Gibsons at gigs. One day he brought his own guitar and because it wasn't a Gibson I wasn't interested, but I tried it out and it was great. It was at the time when Les Pauls were becoming valuable, so I needed something I could play everyday.

'I'd been through a few manufacturers and then I met the people at PRS. We sat down and talked, and I thought they were great people. They understood what I was doing, what I wanted and why I was doing it. It was that relationship. They're great guitars; there are other really great guitars, but I'm very loyal. It's an important thing to me.'

And deliver they did. Their second album *Stand Up*, Barre's first with the band, swiftly went to #1. By the time Tull had parted ways, they had enough gold and platinum to make Mr T jealous.

'The next time out, we were headlining. It was brilliant. Those few gigs in the early days were a learning curve because I was trying to find myself as a player. We were all at the same level, all learning how to play. Once we established ourselves and our music had become quite unique, there was no competition. Not in the quality, but in the musical field. Nobody else did what we did at all.'

Jethro Tull are indeed unique. Although initially introduced in the late '60s as the 'new Cream', things soon changed – so much so that the music business found it nigh on impossible to pigeonhole them. The infamous incident at the Grammys in 1987 when *Crest Of A Knave* stole the Best Hard Rock/Metal Performance award from Metallica, who'd released the metal behemoth *Justice For All*, perhaps best sums up the difficulty everyone had in positioning them. Soon after, Tull's label placed a humorous ad in *Billboard* that read 'The flute is a heavy, metal instrument'.

'Our sound just developed. We always looked at every style of music and followed our noses. We'd get into electronic music with *Under Wraps*, then we'd have Eddie Jobson and Peter-John Vetesse in, and we'd be doing crazy jazzy runs and nice Alan Holdsworth chords, then we'd have Dave Pegg in the band and we'd start looking at folk. It went every direction... it built and built in layers.'

Barre's own playing style is very much his own, albeit with a nod to his friend Leslie West. 'I fiercely ignored guitar players for years because in the early days everybody was trying to sound like Freddie King, BB King and Albert King,' he explains. 'I just went wherever I wanted to. There was a lot of rivalry with bands; the idea was that they were your enemy and you had to blow them off stage. The only person that really influenced me was Leslie, because Mountain were the first band that seemed like really nice people! He came over to England and stayed at my house and we used to jam in the back room. I get a lot of my harmonic things from him because I loved his style. I learnt how to inject melody into improvisation. He was, and still is, a beautifully fluid, melodic soloist. It took me away from all the pyrotechnics of speed – the kind of thing I've never been a fan of.'

Despite their agreeable demeanour, Tull incited their fair share of trouble. Riots seemed to follow them around the globe, but they were caused not by their attitude but by their popularity. 'I think it was all coincidence! There was one in Frankfurt, the first gig we did in Germany. It was a small hall and the fans couldn't get in, so they broke all the windows. At Red Rocks it was sold out again, but the police mismanaged it. They attacked with riot gear and tear gas outside the gig and it all came into the stadium. The crowd didn't like it, so they set fire to cars. It was horrible.

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Jethro Tull, 1989: 'As a rock band, we'd never played the quieter songs on stage'

Listen up

MARTIN BARRE
Away With Words
(2013)
Barre rearranges some of Jethro Tull's quieter moments and blends them with his own fantastic instrumentation for an (almost) all-acoustic work of true beauty

JETHRO TULL
Aqualung
(1971)
Jethro Tull's multi-million selling masterpiece of prog mixes blues, folk, hard rock and psychedelia. Barre is at the height of his powers with improvised solos, arena riffing and some experimental majesty

'Italy was another place with quite a few riots. Some radio station in Milan or Turin would announce "Jethro Tull is music for the people! It's free!" But it wasn't, it was sold out. So it all went crazy again. It was never a good feeling. It was never because of the music. If we played the whole of *A Passion Play* that would subdue a whole country, let alone an audience!'

The riots may have subsided, but the music rages on. With *Away With Words* Martin revives some of the more subdued Tull tracks, oft-neglected in their live set, using a clever blend of instruments including guitar, bouzouki, mandolin, bass, flute, bass clarinet, whistles, bodhran and blues harp... and the odd well-placed electric guitar.

'I was always looking for old Tull songs to re-build and bring back into the set, whether it was Tull or my solo band,' he reflects. 'The quieter songs were so melodic, with some really lovely chords, but as a "rock" band we'd never played them on stage. I've got more and more into acoustic instruments, and though I've dabbled in it, this was a total commitment to something virtually all-acoustic... something very quiet, very arranged.'

A favourite moment is Martin's delicate interpretation of *From A Deadbeat To An Old Greaser* (from 1976's *Too Old to Rock'n'Roll: Too Young to Die!*). Its recognisable melody appears gracefully from Martin's own *Spare A Thought* and is a fine example of his subtlety of touch and an enviable ability to arrange complex ideas without losing the space. Elsewhere the sumptuous *Long Ago* introduces a dexterous version of Tull's *Home* (*Stormwatch,* 1979), beautified by a soothing bass clarinet passage; Tull's *Fire At Midnight* (*Songs From The Wood,* 1977) joins *From The Ashes* to great effect, and the chamber-esque *First Light* perfectly sets the scene for a smooth take on *Moths,* a folky flute-led cut from Tull's 1978 album *Heavy Horses*.

'I love *From A Deadbeat To An Old Greaser,* but I think we only played it on one acoustic tour. These are my favourite Tull songs because they weren't played to death. I didn't really want to really change them. Half of it's my music, though. I've taken those Tull pieces and then written something in sympathy with them, because I didn't just want to do covers.'

Barre uses many techniques as well as a refined mindfulness to bring the compositions to life. 'I love fingerstyle playing, but my album is a mixture. It depends on what instrument I'm using, and the sound. There's so many variants: hard picks, soft picks, thumb, thumbnail, fingers, fingernails... it's all part of the tone and feel. It's about inventing improvisation. You hear a melody a split second before you play it, so you're not just playing "the licks". I play where my brain tells me to go.

'Inventing improvisation is about hearing the melody a split second before you play it'

'Steve Vai is a big advocate of that. He says you should find your own scales, hear where the next note is and learn the intervals. It's about knowing the fretboard. In theory you should be able to play around any chord shape you can throw at the book, no matter how unrelated the chords are.'

Martin Barre clearly enjoys the control of going solo. 'I love having a lot to do. I like arranging, I like producing, I love writing and I like doing artwork. It's a big thing for me to do everything myself without being the focus of attention. Steve Lukather always goes on about the importance of rhythm. Most people want to be the big solo guitar but ignore that side of playing. I realised how little I was playing in the latter days of Tull; it was very supportive and very minimal because it needed to be. The solo albums always give me the opportunity to find out what I was all about.'

It takes a special kind of guitarist to play the foil to an eccentric, hopping, bearded, tartan-clad, larger-than-life rock star such as Ian Anderson, and while Martin Barre is surely the ultimate guy to have standing stage left, his solo albums reveal a man who not only played an equal part in the Jethro Tull vision, but has a burgeoning doctrine of his own.

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Show Of Force

Joe Bonamassa is celebrating the release of no less than four live concert DVDs. *G&B* caught up with him to talk about what he likes best – guitars, guitars and guitars. Interview by **Steve Bailey**

Back in 2005, in front of a threadbare crowd of around 100 people, Joe Bonamassa took to the stage for his very first gig on these shores at London's Borderline club. Just four years later, he was playing to a packed-out Royal Albert Hall, complete with a now legendary guest slot from Eric Clapton. Rarely has there been such a rise from an artist known first and foremost for his guitar skills... and to achieve it in recent years puts him in a category of one. His talent was obvious from the start, but his willingness to work hard set him apart early on. It took incessant touring, seemingly playing every single tiny blues-rock friendly venue in the UK, and a constant string of releases to secure his place in the public consciousness. Bonamassa has no less than 10 studio albums and six live albums to his name since 2000; all the live efforts are available on DVD too. That's not to mention his four albums with the Glenn Hughes-fronted supergroup Black Country Communion and his two with singer Beth Hart. All told, he's taken part in almost two releases a year, resulting in grumblings in some quarters about 'cashing in'.

'If you see me playing a Les Paul on stage it's generally not a reissue, it's an old one'

Some doubters claim Bonamassa is long on technique and short on emotional expression, but any time spent in the man's company proves beyond any doubt how passionate, and indeed erudite, he is about his music – and his instruments. As for the cash, it seems the bulk of what he earns gets ploughed into his stunning vintage guitar collection, and the majority of that is presented for the enjoyment of his audiences on tour, regardless of the highest of price tags.

Joe pretty much grew up in his parents' guitar store in Utica, upstate New York, and was a vintage guitar obsessive from an early age. For those who love to see and hear classic guitars stretched to their very limits, there's no better place to be than a Bonamassa gig. Just for starters he'll generally show up to almost every gig with a couple of original '59 or '60 Les Pauls in tow.

'If you see me play a Les Paul on stage it's generally not a reissue, it'll be a old one,' he assures us. 'Right now I'm touring and I have two 1960s with me; a skinny-necked one and an early '60 with a fat neck. How can I justify owing seven original 'bursts if I don't play them?'

Joe's first original burst, 'Magellan', is a '59. It was named after the great 16th century nautical explorer Ferdinand Magellan, as Bonamassa and the guitar also circumnavigated the globe when on tour in 2011. Despite longing for such a guitar for years, initially he found playing it to be intimidating.

'For the first two weeks I had it I let it play me and I didn't play it. What I mean is, I was timid around it,' Joe recalls. 'I had spent all that money on a guitar and I was playing worse than if I'd just used a reissue. So eventually I just said, screw it, I'm gonna play this damn thing! You've got to go for it. People are so scared to even turn a screw on these things, but you've got to or else they'd just be disintegrating.'

As none of his reissue Les Pauls have ever been broken on tour Joe's philosophy is that just because he now plays guitars worth hundreds of thousands of pounds, there's no reason why they should be unlucky either. Which is all well and good, but we all know the fate of Clapton's 'Beano' LP. Surely he must worry that some light-fingered reprobate might try and grab one of his? 'The thing is, what are they gonna do with it?' he reasons. 'Each maple top is like a fingerprint...' ➔

Gear

Guitars

Joe now has no less than seven original Les Paul Standards, and most have names. The 1959s are dubbed Magellan, Spot and Principal Skinner; the 1960s are Batman, Johnny Fever and The Runt, while his most recent purchase, a '60 sourced from South Africa, is yet to be christened. Other Gibsons include a '52 Les Paul goldtop, a '63 Firebird I, and a cherry '64 ES-335. Fenders include a '63 Strat and a '54 Tele. Acoustics: Alvarez and Gibson Songwriters

Amps

Marshall JTM and Silver Jubilee heads, Dumble and Van Weelden Twinkleland

Joe brought out two '59 'bursts for the London Tour De Force shows – this one, 'Spot', is perhaps his most famous

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Bonamassa takes on the Royal Albert Hall: 'It's the pinnacle, a great, great venue'

Joe gives his latest 'burst – a late '60 found in South Africa – an outing at the Hammersmith Apollo

And Another Thing...

Thoughtfully, Joe Bonamassa has posted pictures and a description of some of his most treasured guitars including most of his 'bursts. Go to http://jbonamassa.com/joes-guitar-of-the-week/ to check out just some of his incredible collection

no two are exactly the same. Whoever they try to sell it to will know it's my guitar. I'm very public with the serial numbers and everything else for that reason. My view is, if you're gonna take them, have fun – but just don't break them, because I'll get them back. It's just a question of when.'

Joe's prolific output continues with a set of DVDs, dubbed *Tour de Force,* that bring home just what a feast of fine guitars and spectacular fretwork a Bonamassa gig is. During March 2013 he was filmed playing four special shows in London over five days to celebrate his eight-year journey from that first Borderline gig to touring big arenas over this summer.

> *'We took up an entire hotel with crew and musicians. It was like Barnum & Bailey'*

Each gig represented a stepping stone in his career and featured a different band along with a completely different set. From the 300-capacity Borderline in Soho (the Power Trio Night), to the Shepherds Bush Empire (the Blues Night), the cavernous Hammersmith Apollo (the Rock And Roll Night), and the opulent grandeur of the Royal Albert Hall (the Acoustic Electric Night), all reverberated to Joe's exhilarating brand of supremely rendered blues-rock.

'We took up an entire hotel with film crews, the guest musicians and the crew,' Bonamassa marvels. 'It was "Look at this circus! It's like Barnum & Bailey!"'

Above and beyond the staggering fretwork on show, those of a certain disposition could also view these gigs as a showcase for a host of fantastic instruments. Joe loves nothing better than to talk guitars and he gave us the low-down on some of the beautiful six-strings that featured. To kick off the run at the Borderline, he revisited early material with the help of an old friend.

'In the beginning of my career a lot of my music was written for a Strat,' he explains. 'I think I play a Strat in a different way to a Les Paul, and a lot of the people at that gig had been there from the start, so I knew they would be happy to see me break out the three-pickup guitar again. I've had that '63 Strat since I was 18 years old. I just love it. I have other Strats – a '55, a '56, a '58, a '61 and another '63 – but the old '63 is the one I've had the longest. It's difficult to find a Strat that sounds that thick, almost like a Gibson.'

Of course there were Gibsons at the Borderline too. A gorgeous 1952 trapeze-tailpiece goldtop was given a brief spin, and the first of a trio of original Standards came out too. 'That's a '59,' states Joe matter-of-factly. 'I've had it for two years. It's in the *Beauty Of The 'Burst* book – it's the one they call Spot. It's got the double white PAFs in it, and it's a cool-sounding guitar.'

The guitar was named Spot by a previous owner because a small section of the burst hadn't faded, and you can tell that the pickup bobbins are white as the covers have been removed. 'That's the way I bought it,' Bonamassa says. 'Having the covers off opens them up, but I don't have the balls to pop the covers on any of my others!'

Another Borderline show-stopper was the slightly bizarre-looking one-off Gibson Skylark that Joe uses for slide. 'That was supposed to become a production model but they never got it off the ground,' he explains. 'Chris Swope built it in the Custom Shop around 2006. He would show it to these other cats and they would be like "Oh yeah, it sounds Stonesy", and Chris would go "You don't get it". I picked it up and said this is basically a Fender Stringmaster bolted onto a Gibson, and he's like "You can have it!" It's korina wood and the body is two-tiered, like a Skylark lap steel. The pickups are single coils but you can blend them so they become like a humbucker. It's a very interesting guitar.'

The Shepherds Bush Empire gig was billed as the blues night, and backed by a full horn section, Bonamassa played the majority of the set on a pair of lovely ES-335s, his favourite being a cherry '64 'just like Clapton's'. He also wheeled out another original sunburst from his stash. 'I just got that,' Joe purrs. 'It's a late 1960 – probably from September or October – with the skinny neck. It came out of South Africa and it was played on many famous early 1960s folk recordings over there. That guitar would have been gigged all over Africa. I just love that story. I traded a '50s Tele and some money for it, and it's one of my favourites. It's within three feet of me right now.'

A man with a Les Paul obsession was always likely to be no stranger to the work of Paul Kossoff, and ➔

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Bonamassa rocks Rory Gallagher's Strat at the Royal Albert Hall

Listen up

JOE BONAMASSA
Tour De Force - Live In London (2013)
Four shows available as separate DVD/BluRays or as a limited edition box-set (the latter in special 'Marshall' packaging – see below). Our faves were the Borderline and the Royal Albert Hall gigs, but each of the four has its own distinct character, with a different band and set list. As much as we enjoy Joe's studio albums, watching his fingers fly around the fretboard really takes things to another level. The RAH gig is particularly great for a name-that-burst session, with Peter Green's and Bernie Marsden's Les Pauls alongside Joe's own.

the stripped Gibson Custom Shop Les Paul that served at Shepherds Bush is a tribute to the great man. 'That's a reissue that Kim LaFleur of Historic Makeovers [see www.historicmakeovers.com] aged to look like Paul Kossoff's *Alright Now* guitar. It was on all the early stuff like *Tons Of Sobs* and I think it was on John Peel, or one of those radio shows, when Paul had the Orange backline and that thing was just howling. Unbelievable! I always wanted a guitar that looked like that.'

You'll often see Joe with a reverse Firebird, and the model has been a mainstay since childhood. 'My very first vintage electric guitar was a '72 Medallion Firebird. That was my introduction, when I was about 12,' he confirms. 'The headstock had already been off about 50 times when I got it and I broke it off once myself too. My friend Dan Silverman was crazy enough to give me the '63 Firebird I that I play on a long-term loan, and he won't take it back. A very nice gesture. It's a beautiful guitar and it goes into that whole Clapton thing – he had a Firebird I, so that's the one everybody wants.'

At the Hammersmith Apollo Joe wheeled out the acoustics and did a turn as his own support act, playing a set of fingerpicked faves like *Jelly Roll*, *Seagull* and *Woke Up Dreaming*. Once he dramatically retook the stage with the electric band he was aided by the Magellan 'burst and his South African import, but the surprise addition was the '50s blackguard Telecaster he employed on *Driving Towards Daylight*. It turns out that there was a ulterior motive.

'That was the guitar I traded for the South African 'burst along with some money. The deal was I would play the Tele for the tour and then trade it to my friend Detlef Alder in Germany,' he explains. 'His shop Guitar Point is just outside Frankfurt and it's probably one of the greatest vintage shops in the world. I got the 'burst, and he got the Tele with its DVD photo-op.'

The Albert Hall was the fitting venue for the last night and the place holds a special place in Joe's heart, despite the memory of the nerves he had to face down the first time he played there. 'I had a lot more fun this time. The pressure in 2009 was huge. I don't even remember much of the gig, to be honest, so it was great to go back. The venue is just bigger than the event every time. It's the pinnacle.'

This time Joe opened up with the full acoustic band complete with banjo, nyckelharpa, violin and mandolin, something he hopes to be doing a lot more of. 'It's the band from the Vienna DVD (*An Acoustic Evening At The Vienna Opera House*, to give it its full title). We play for 45 minutes, take a 15-minute intermission and then hit 'em with the electric stuff. Having the double band makes it a real spectacle.'

The highlight of the electric set for us was undoubtedly seeing Joe play Peter Green's legendary Les Paul courtesy of its current curator, *G&B*'s own vintage expert Phil Harris. 'I rock that thing!' Bonamassa exclaims. 'That thing is happening, it needs to played. When I first tried it in 2007 it was awful. The frets were all over the place and it buzzed. I would have rated it as the worst-playing original Les Paul I had ever played. Now they've Pleked it, and it's evened up the frets. They've cleaned it up, got the action happening, got the bridge set correctly and they've got it rocking. Now the thing just explodes. That out-of-phase position is unlike anything I've ever heard, it just booms.'

Having just played one of the most famous guitars on the planet, Joe then wheeled out another – Rory Gallagher's weathered old Strat, this time kindly offered by Rory's brother Donal. 'He's loaned it to me a couple of times. What an honour to play that thing. It's a wonderful Strat, and they're a wonderful family. My girlfriend Sandy [singer-songwriter Sandy Thom] met Donal and she hooked it up for me to play it for my birthday one year. Me and Donal have been friends ever since. I just look at it and I can't even believe I'm in the same room with it.'

> *'Rory's Strat is wonderful. I look at it and I can't believe I'm in the same room with it'*

Creating four live DVDs in such a short space of time with such a breadth of material and backing musicians was wildly ambitious, but for connoisseurs of the six-string the project succeeds on several levels and captures just how much Bonamassa puts into every show. However, the strain did take its toll. 'That's a cheque that a 25 year old might be able to cash, not a soon-to-be 37 year old,' Joe concedes. 'There was a lot of pressure and about a million bucks on the line. I felt so drained at the end. So I will say this: it was a great experience... but I will never do it again, ever!'

He'll never neglect his British followers though, as he regards them as the bedrock of his success. 'I wanted to give the fans that have been with me for the last decade something special to thank them for their unwavering support. This really was for those people. It's always an honour and a privilege to play for them.'

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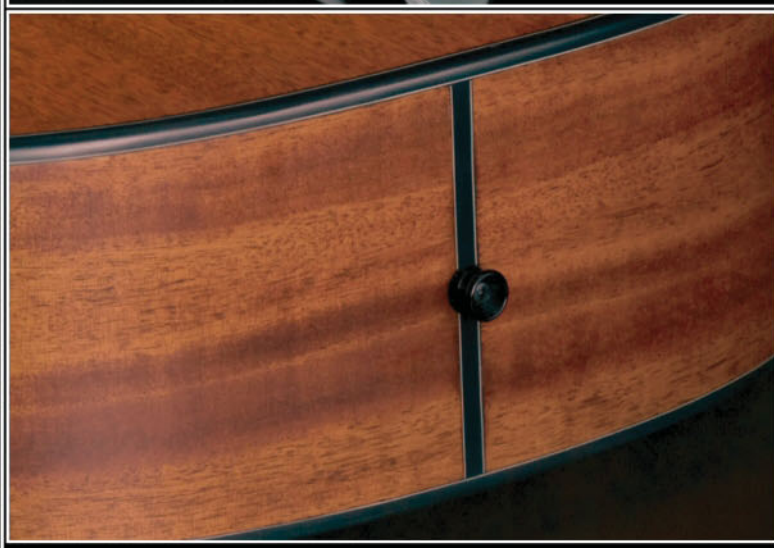

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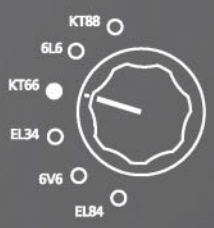

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EPIPHONE
Ltd Ed 1966 G-400 Pro

Take the basic G-400, add a large pickguard, keystone tuners, coil-tappable Alnico Classic Pro pickups and a bunch of new finishes and you've got the limited edition Pro. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

Introduced by Gibson in 1961 as the 'replacement' for its single-cut Les Paul model, the SG has become a classic in its own right. Angus Young, Eric Clapton, Carlos Santana, Tony Iommi, Frank Zappa, Pete Townshend, Derek Trucks, Thom Yorke – the list of famous players is practically never-ending. Sound aside, the design has two key benefits: SGs are light, which makes them ideal for anyone who gigs a lot or has a back problem; and the upper octave access is great, which makes them a real soloist's instrument.

Real Gibson-branded SGs start at around £500 these days, so it's no wonder that this updated G-400 with an RRP of £348 but a street price of around £260 is catching plenty of attention. As the company is owned by Gibson, an Epiphone version is basically the next best thing. Indeed, the G-400 has been in production since 1989.

The basic contemporary G-400 with its small pickguard, alnico pickups and chrome tuners is a homage to the 1962 model, while this latest revision of the Chinese-built instrument pays tribute to the 1966 version – the year the larger 'batwing' pickguard was introduced. You also get Wilkinson Vintage Classic machineheads with the classy green jadite knobs, and for a contemporary twist – which owes nothing to the mid-'60s at all – the humbucker pickups are coil -tapped, so you can get single coil-type sounds too.

The black plastic nut remains; the '60s era logo" trussrod cover is new

Out go the Grover tuners, in come a set of Wilkinson Vintage Classics

SGs have two key benefits: they're light and they have great fingerboard access, so they're a real soloist's instrument

Out of the case the G-400 Pro looks excellent. The cherry red finish shows off the wood's grain very nicely, and it also allows you to see the underlying construction. Paying more for a guitar these days means fewer pieces of timber, and this budget Epiphone is something of jigsaw puzzle. The body has a three-piece construction; this is not so unusual but, surprisingly, both the front and back of the guitar are laminated to give an even, consistent grain pattern. The heel of the neck, the headstock wings and the back of the headstock are also glued on. ➔

FACTFILE
EPIPHONE LTD ED G-400 PRO

DESCRIPTION
Solidbody electric guitar. Made in China.
PRICE **£348 with Epiphone branded hard case**

BUILD **Three-piece mahogany body with laminated mahogany front and back, mahogany set neck with 22-fret rosewood fingerboard featuring trapezoid pearloid inlays. Plastic nut and Wilkinson Vintage Classic tuners. Nickel hardware including LockTone stopbar and Tune-O-Matic**
ELECTRICS **Two Epiphone Alnico Classic Pro four-wire humbuckers, three-way pickup selector, volume and tone controls. Coil tap on tone control (push/pull)**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes**
FINISH **Alpine white, pelham blue, silverburst, cherry, ebony**

SCALE LENGTH
24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH
Nut 43mm
12th fret 54.5mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 22.2mm
12th fret 25.6mm
STRING SPACING
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Bridge 52mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
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RRP **£359**

Vintage
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Basic but well-built and powerful homage to the SG. Small pickguard and quality Wilkinson hardware throughout, including humbucking pickups
RRP **£279**

None of this is essentially a problem and indeed the neck is probably stronger as a result; however, it's unlikely that a multi-piece body will be quite as resonant as one made from a single slab. In fairness, however, most Gibson SGs have had two-piece bodies for decades, and contemporary three-piece ones are common, while these days solid slabs come at Custom Shop prices.

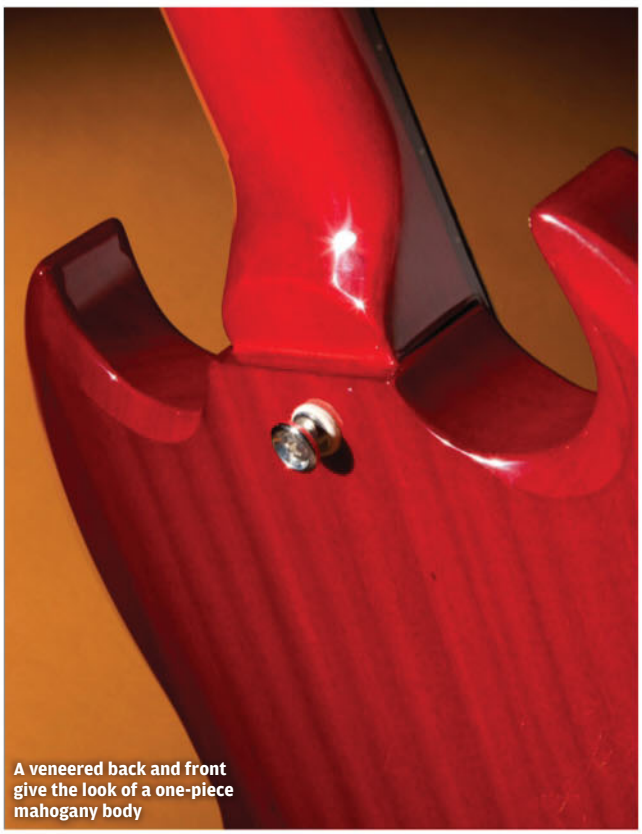
The glued-in neck feels chubbier than the '60s Slim Taper that's specified, but it's a pleasing and not-overbuilt handful. We'd rather err on the chunky side rather than drift towards the type of skinnier neck that became synonymous with Gibson in the 1970s.

The rosewood fingerboard is buffed to quite a hard sheen and a little compound has been trapped in the grain. The medium gauge fretwire is the right choice, and the installation is faultless. The fingerboard isn't bound, but the tangs are hidden. SGs can be a little neck-heavy, but this one balances perfectly on the strap.

In terms of hardware the G-400 Pro has the basic stoptail and the Tune-O-Matic bridge you'd expect. The pickups are Alnico Classic Pros, both of the four-wire variety to facilitate the coil tap, which is activated by the push/pull action of the individual volume controls. We were half expecting to find miniature pots hiding inside the control cavity so the full-size 500k components and very solid switchgear all came as a pleasant surprise.

Controls are the same as on the standard G-400 save for the push-pull volume pots

The Alnico Classic Pros are refreshingly open and warm and make the G-400 sound like a more expensive guitar


A veneered back and front give the look of a one-piece mahogany body

Sounds

The G-400's fully-humbucking clean tone is surprising good: not at all boxy on the bridge setting and the twin pickup and neck pickup sounds are refreshingly open with an unexpectedly warm bass response. Really, this does sound like a much more expensive guitar. In terms of clarity these clean voices definitely outperform the vintage soupiness of some of their Gibson equivalents.

SGs are practically born to rock, so it comes as no surprise that winding up the gain makes a good thing even better. The G-400 Pro moves effortlessly between the realms of electric blues and jazz and on into the territory of metal and hard rock. The bridge pickup is a real screamer with just the right amount of pick-edge tone for articulation and nuance. There's bags of sustain when you need it, and big chunky rock chords have the right amount of swaggering authority.

The coil-tapped single-coil tones are initially less impressive, as there's an inevitable volume drop when you pull the switch. To really make use of the feature you need a booster pedal or even a graphic EQ pedal, as the natural sound is too bright and toppy. With a bit of a push in the bass/mid frequency range (or, alternatively, a bit of treble cut) you can create a fair approximation of a P90-style tone, which is very useful indeed. The guitar's tone controls are functional but not especially responsive.

Verdict

It's very hard to knock this Epiphone off a pedestal, frankly. The price is very good indeed, and the guitar is well made and sounds great. However, if you're a full-time humbucker player and a coil tap doesn't appeal – and you're not that fussed about the look of the larger pickguard – then it's worth checking out the basic model as well. Theoretically, you could buy the lower-cost guitar and spend the difference on a professional setup and maybe have the plastic nut replaced with a bone one. This said, the G-400 Pro that we were supplied with has a near faultless set-up, so if this is the general standard out of the factory the added TLC isn't necessarily going to make a huge amount of difference.

FINAL SCORE

EPIPHONE LTD ED 1966 G-400 PRO	
Build Quality	**17**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**19**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

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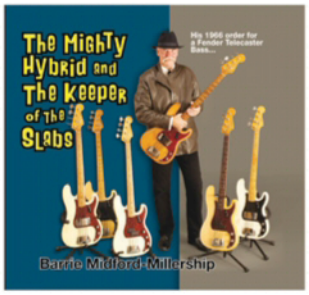

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MICHAEL KELLY
Vibe

Sharp-cutaway Byrdland meets ES-335 meets Gretsch... the new Michael Kelly Vibe guitar offers quite a mélange of features and comes in at a nice price. Review by **Huw Price**

The Michael Kelly Vibe model sets out to make a strong impression but comes complete with a set of mixed messages. At first glance, you might think it's going to be a modern twist on the hollow ES-125/Gretsch single cut theme. Then you'll notice the string set includes a wound G, so you begin entertaining the possibility that this is a thinline jazzer. Ultimately, you'll lift it out of the cardboard box and discover that it weighs more than most Gibson Les Pauls. So what exactly is going on?

The weight comes from a solid centre block of wood running from the set neck joint to the tail, and by peering through the f-hole on the bass side you can see that the block seems to be formed from multiple layers of maple and mahogany. The body is 1.75" deep, just like an ES-335, and the fingerboard extension is glued to the top of the body.

The Vibe's chunky C-profile neck wouldn't feel out of place on a late '50s Gibson reissue. Some players have a very strong preference for a specific neck depth or profile while others prefer different guitars to have a different feel; on balance we think this neck suits the Vibe very well and it's quite comfortable to play. However, when it arrived, this guitar was barely playable; the strings were very stiff and there seemed to be no sonic benefit to be gained from having such a heavy set. After discussions with the distributor we decided that somebody at the factory had experienced a lapse in judgment and we elected to put on a regular set of 10s with a plain G for the purposes of the review. The reason we're mentioning this is that the Vibe is a brand-new model and all the ones the distributor had in stock were set up the same way, so that's what you may encounter in the shops.

The Vibe certainly lives up to its name with some particularly nice flame on the laminated maple top and rich, red-brown bubinga for the sides and bookmatched back. The body is ➔

Laminated bubinga back and sides, mahogany neck and cream binding

Generous neck profile and a set of chrome kidney-button tuners

The chunky C-profile neck wouldn't feel out of place on a late '50s Gibson reissue, and it suits the Vibe well

FACTFILE
MICHAEL KELLY VIBE

DESCRIPTION **Semi-acoustic electric. Made in Indonesia**
PRICE **£439**

BUILD **Semi-solid single-cut body with flame maple laminate front and bubinga back, set 22-fret bubinga neck, bound rosewood fingerboard, tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, diecast Grover tuners**
ELECTRICS **Two PAF Plus humbucking pickups, three-way switch, individual volume and tone controls**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **Tiger's eye**

SCALE LENGTH
628mm/24.75"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 42mm
12th fret 53mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 21mm
Ninth fret 24mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 35mm
Bridge 51mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.5mm
12th fret bass 3.5mm
WEIGHT **4.1kg/9lbs**

CONTACT **Rosetti UK**
01376 550033
michaelkellyguitars.com

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Like this? Try this...

Epiphone
50th Anniversary 1962 Sorrento
Nice reissue of Epiphone's version of the ES-125TD, with an all-hollow laminated maple body and two mini-humbuckers. Nice old-style T-shape headstock logo and a choice of natural or royal olive finishes; comes with a hard case
RRP **£497**

Ibanez
AGR73T-TWS
Think mini White Falcon complete with white finish, clear pickguard and gold old-school vibrato with a roller bridge plus two humbucking pickups. A neat combo of old and new
RRP **£452**

Eastwood
Classic 6 WH
Another poor man's White Falcon but this time with a double-cutaway laminated maple body, maple neck, rosewood board, two EW-Retro humbuckers, a trapeze tail (the Deluxe has the whammy) and Gotoh chrome hardware
RRP **£366**

bound front and back, along with the fingerboard, f-holes and the headstock. The chrome hardware is all fairly run of the mill: diecast 'kidney' Grover tuners combine with a tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece, and the black speed knobs match the switch tip. Pearl inlays grace the rosewood fingerboard and a sliver of flame maple at the tip of the headstock carries the metal 'MK' logo. The pickup covers have 'H' shaped cutouts to make them resemble Filtertrons, but the description reads 'PAF Plus' and since they ohm out at 8.5K and 9K, we didn't anticipate much in the way of truly twangy sounds.

Two things let this guitar down, but neither is especially serious. Firstly, the fret ends are rough and ragged with scuff marks clearly visible from the bevelling tool; secondly, the pickguard is a bit of a monstrosity. Companies like Heritage have used wood pickguards to good effect and the factory that made the Vibe has chosen flame-fronted maple ply with a pressed-in logo and a silky satin finish. Unfortunately they didn't go to the trouble of edging the thing with binding to match the body, and the bevelled edge is very uneven.

Pickup switch in the Les Paul position and fingerboard markers that look like those on a Trini Lopez

The Vibe is a different, toneful and easy-playing guitar and a lot of fun for blues, rock, slide or even fingerpicking

The Vibe's pickups may resemble Flitertrons but they are in fact higher-powered 'PAF Plus' Humbuckers

The shape does lack style and it looks incongruous on this otherwise well-made and well-finished guitar.

Sounds

Acoustically the Vibe has a fairly loud resonance with a bright sprang and the even string balance you might expect from a semi-solid. Having said that, it's not as much fun to play unplugged as, say, an Epiphone Casino or a Gretsch Electromatic. Initial concerns that the pickups would be too hot were quickly dispelled; in clean mode the bridge pickup sounds bright, clear and well-defined... we even managed to coax some convincing country out of it. The neck pickup provides a degree of contrast. It's far warmer, fuller and smoother, so woody jazz tones are on the menu too. Flick to the middle position and you can combine the articulation of the bridge with fuller bass from the neck and a hint of phasiness. Just slip on the thumbpick, step on the slapback echo and enjoy some quality Travis time.

Whether you get your overdrive from a pedal or your amp, the Vibe's bridge pickup benefits from a touch of treble attenuation to soften its bite; after that, you're rewarded with big power chords and well-defined solo tones. The semi-solid qualities are more apparent on the neck setting, which serves up some sweet bluesiness with thicker texture and ample sustain. Both pickups are slightly microphonic but squeal-free, and it's no more prone to harmonic feedback than most solidbody guitars.

Verdict

We had to put a bit more time than usual into this guitar to get it up and running, and you may need to do the same. Fortunately it was worth the effort, and the Vibe turns out to be a toneful and easy-playing guitar that's a lot of fun. If you're looking for something a bit different for blues, rock, slide or even fingerpicking, the Vibe's good looks and versatility make it a strong contender.

FINAL SCORE

MICHAEL KELLY VIBE	
Build Quality	**16**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**16**/20
Value for money	**17**/20
Vibe	**18**/20
TOTAL	**83%**

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MATAMP
GT2

There's still a place in this world for mighty, elephant-slaying rock heads, and Matamp's full-power GT2 is a proper old-school big-bore device. Review by **Huw Price**

FACTFILE
MATAMP GT2

DESCRIPTION **Twin-channel 100W valve head with 4/8/16 Ohm output. Made in the UK**
PRICE **£1799 inc. delivery**

CONTROLS **Ch1/Ch2/FSW selector, Voice, Gain/Vol, Bass, Middle, Treble, Presence, Master 1/Off (Channel 1) & Voice, Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble, Presence, Master 2 (Ch 2)**
VALVES **Four ECC83s, four EL34s (50W version also available)**

DIMENSIONS **55cm wide x 25cm high x 30cm deep**
WEIGHT **24kg/52.8lbs**

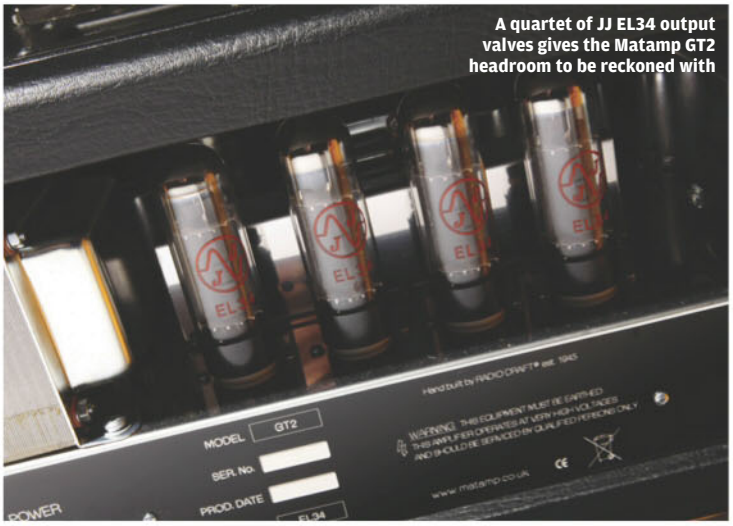
CONTACT **Matamp**
01484 854883
0845 6444606
www.matamp.co.uk

The term 'overbuilt' is often used when it comes to describing amps, but it's not always justified. In this case it probably is, because the Matamp GT2 head on its own weighs almost as much as some 100W combos. The enclosure walls are thick, and the specially-wound transformers are huge. This amp really does take sturdy to an epic scale.

Constructed with hybrid PCB/turret boards and powered by a quartet of EL34 valves, the GT2 is rated at 100W in pentode mode. A switch on the rear panel puts the EL34s into triode mode to halve the power, and it's worth noting that the GT2 has fixed bias with no negative feedback.

The two channels are fully independent, with separate gain, master volume and EQ controls. High and low inputs are provided, and you can select channels via a front panel switch or a seemingly bombproof footswitch. The footswitch also activates Channel 2's boost feature and you can set the level using the Boost control on the front. The passive FX loop connections are also at the front, but the control panel is clear and uncluttered.

Our example is finished in smooth black tolex with white piping and a chromed metal grille over the valves. It looks impressive, and Matamp will also build an amp to your preferred specs. This applies to the circuit as well as the cosmetics, so you can visit the factory with your own guitar and Matamp will fine-tune the circuit to your taste while you're actually playing through the amp. They'll also do custom engraving, so you can have your own name or the name of your band on the front panel.



A quartet of JJ EL34 output valves gives the Matamp GT2 headroom to be reckoned with

Matamp can build an amp to your specs, including fine-tuning the circuit while you're actually playing through it

Sounds

This amp has the potential to become punishingly loud, and caution is required if you wish to preserve your hearing. Channel 1 is not unlike a classic Hiwatt in the way it seems to have boundless quantities of clean headroom and never gets completely saturated. The master volume bypass switch ➔

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Gartone
Magnum 100
A custom-built two-channel UK head designed for guitarists who need power with excellent clean and distorted tones. Features 6L6 power valves with Mercury Magnetics transformers and relay channel switching
RRP **£1895**

Mesa/Boogie
Dual Rectifier
With 100/50W, three channels, Class A/B, power with four 6L6GCs, five 12AX7s and two 5U4 rectifier valves, this high-gain classic has eight modes, a tube/transistor rectifier switch, serial FX loop and slave output. The price includes a six-way footswitch and a cover
RRP **£2312**

Hiwatt
HGS100H
A high-gain all-valve two-channel amp with high and low sensitivity inputs and Normal and Bright options on each. Power comes from four EL34s and either four ECC83s or three ECC83s and one ECC81, giving a tighter sound
RRP **£1655**

is a neat feature and it's the way to go if loud clean tones are a priority.

The GT2 can deliver subtle, delicate and refined clean tones. Even so, this is a full-frequency monster whose reserves of power and sheer grunt are apparent even when it's barely idling. There's a point around one o'clock on Channel 1's Gain control where the GT2 hits an obvious sweet spot; the midrange fills out and the overall tone feels a bit more joined up. We had expected the sound to be identical with the Master Volume control bypassed and fully up, but bypass mode was both louder and clearer.

Channel 1 is very clear, expressive and dynamic, and it responds well to overdrive and clean boost pedals. The Voice control should be regarded as a necessity rather than a luxury because the low end is simply enormous. If you play through a bassy-sounding cabinet or speakers, or if space constraints force you to place a cabinet against a wall or in a corner, bass roll-off may be required to keep the boominess at bay. Matamp suggest that the feature is intended primarily for humbuckers, but we ended up using it with Stratocaster's single-coils too.

The clear tones have a degree of hi-fi clarity that allows the subtleties of pickup tones and playing touch to come through. There is plenty of tone shaping power with the tone controls,

With so much low-end power available, the Voice knob is a feature you'll constantly use

but the sound never takes on any of the 'processed' quality that occasionally characterises amps with extensive eq controls. The high frequencies remain sweet and the midrange has a woody texture that takes on a smooth growl with higher output pickups or higher-gain settings. Even flat out, the most you'll get is a smooth breakup rather than out-and-out overdrive, and your speakers may actually be distorting more than the amp itself.

With the master and tone controls set identically and the volume levels already set high, the extra overdrive and upper harmonics are even more apparent. As with the Gain controls an obvious sweet spot is reached around the one o'clock mark and the GT2 eases into a seriously heavy and harmonically rich distortion with a hint of fizziness only creeping in as gain approaches maximum. Power chords sound huge, and lead lines have effortless sustain with ample pick attack and clarity.

The GT2 is beautifully made, but its sheer power means it's better suited to large stages rather than club gigs

With boost and channel switching at your toes, the Matamp can cover tons of ground without outboard overdrive

balanced as closely as possible, it's hard to detect any difference in tone between the two channels. If pushed, we'd say that Channel 1 is ever so slightly clearer and the mids are thicker on Channel 2... but there's hardly anything in it. The difference is that this 'equivalency' is achieved with Channel 1's gain control at one o'clock and Channel 2's barely turned on, so the gain range of Channel 2 is far wider. Fine adjustments are possible because clipping comes on very gradually. A thick and chewy overdrive is well to the fore by the time the gain control passes the halfway point, and Channel 2 reaches full-on distortion with Gain maxed out. That said, it's more of a classic big British amp tone than modern crunch or high gain, and you can still clean up the sound from your guitar volume.

As you might expect, dialing in the boost raises volume but, if Gain is

Verdict

Matamp has been hand-building valve amps since rock music was in its infancy. The GT2 is beautifully made, and it's obvious that it hasn't simply rolled off a regular factory production line. The triode switching adds to the versatility, but the sheer power of the GT2 almost demands a 2x12" cabinet, at the very least, so on balance, it's better suited to larger stages rather than pub and small club gigs. The designers have clearly paid equal attention to the clean and dirty tones, making it a versatile amp. Even at its dirtiest the GT2 stops short of ultra-scooped mids iced with a layer of white noise that characterise many modern high-gain US amps, and this is no bad thing, as it's clarity and touch dynamics which really distinguish the GT2 from the crunch crowd.

FINAL SCORE

MATAMP GT2	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**90%**

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YAMAHA THR10X

Dirty tones, clean tones, plenty of effects, a memory, and a spookily huge surround sound: could the latest THR amplifier be the ultimate practice device? Review by **Martyn Casserly**

In the beginning was the valve, and it was good. Then came the transistor, and it wasn't quite as good, but it at least enabled the humble guitarist to practice at sensible domestic levels. Thus it was for most of the '80s. Then the transistor amp begat the digital modelling amp, and there was crying and gnashing of chords in a variety of sonic flavours.

Many winters passed, with bedroom players learning the arcane secrets of deep editing and DSP loads, until once again the valves re-emerged. This time they were restricted to less than five watts and the promise of quietude. Guitarists rejoiced at the return of purity, but also suffered multiple hernias as they had forgotten how damn heavy these things were. Was there no solution to the problem of great tone but light weight? Winds carried the anguish of these players to the far corners of the Earth, and a work was set in motion. Now, behold, the wonders that these trials have spawned. Yamaha, that jewel of the Orient, has set forth its new wonder – the THR range of amps, and lo... they are magnificent.

When you first lay eyes on the THR10X you'd be forgiven for thinking that it was just another small, valve-head amp like the Tiny Terror or the Vox AC4. The compact shape, which is only a little longer than the magazine you're holding, suggests that it would sit nicely on top of the 1x12" cab that you no doubt need to plug it into. But hold up there. You see the grilles at the front? They're not for decoration. Inside are two 8cm speakers – yep, centimetres – that are all the THR10X needs to make some truly impressive tones.

You can save 100 patches via the THR Editor, and five directly on the amp

At home levels of volume the THR's tiny speakers sound strangely effective thanks to Yamaha's hi-fi engineers

Now, of course, you're thinking that 8cms is a little on the small side when as guitarists we're used to 12" speakers, and if you want to gig this amp then you'd be right. When it comes to home levels of volume though, this size is strangely effective. Much of that is down to the clever engineers in Yamaha's hi-fi department who helped design ➔

FACTFILE
YAMAHA THR10X

DESCRIPTION **Solid state 10W combo**
PRICE **£299**

CONNECTIONS **Guitar input, Aux/MP3 input, headphone input, USB connection, power socket, battery compartment**
CONTROLS **Amp selector, five user memory buttons, tap tempo/tuner, Gain, Master, Treble, Mid Bass, Effect, Dly/Rev, Guitar Output, Aux Output**
EFFECT TYPES **Chorus, flanger, phaser, tremolo, delay, delay/reverb, spring reverb, hall reverb, *compressor, *noise gate (*only available in the THR Editor)**

DIMENSIONS **360mm x 183.5mm x 140mm**
WEIGHT **2.8kg/6.2lbs**

CONTACT **Yamaha**
0844 811 1116
www.uk.yamaha.com

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Like this? Try this...

Orange
Tiny Terror
The pocket rocket that started the whole mini-head craze. As the name suggests it's very small, but that doesn't stop it being brilliant. You'll need a speaker cab to hear anything though
RRP **£365**

Roland
Cube Lite
It might look like a Bluetooth speaker but this little unit packs a punch with three amp models and the ability to connect to your iOS device
RRP **£145**

Boss
JS-10
Boss might be more famous for their effects, but this unit is an all in one practice amp that boasts 2.1 channel sound, dual inputs, and of course loads of emulated pedals. Great stuff
RRP **£389**

The layout is simple and intuitive – and the military green livery is a winner too

the THR range. Whatever the maths and physics involved, the results are excellent. Simply plug your guitar in, select an amp model, dial in your tone, and you'll be having fun in no time.

The diminutive case sports a dark green metal faceplate with a row of dials on top. Three control the EQ, alongside a Master Volume, Gain, two effects dials, and two output controls that allow you to blend the volume of the guitar with the signal from an MP3 player connected via the AUX socket. A last dial allows you to select between five modes across three distorted amp models (Power 1&2, Brown 1&2, and Southern Hi), plus clean, bass, or flat options. You have the option to save five user-defined tones, and there's also tap tempo and tuner functions. Turning the unit around reveals a power input, USB port, and the battery compartment into which you can put 8xAAs then take to the streets as the Joe Satriani of the busking world.

This basic, well chosen layout provides everything you need, and pretty much nothing you don't. If you pine for extra features then the USB port offers access to the THR Editor via your PC. This software will give you greater control over the parameters and allows you to change some of the preset effects. The port also turns the THR10X into a recording interface that you can use with a variety of DAWs, and the tones that we captured through it were very good indeed.

Perhaps one of our favourite touches is the orange glow that emanates from behind the grille when the unit is turned on. No, there's no valves inside, but there are a couple of coloured LEDs that make it look like there is. We can't tell whether Yamaha were having a laugh or trying to fool people, and to be honest we don't really care. It just looks cool.

The THR10X is light, visually pleasing, sonically impressive, and just plain fun to play: Yamaha has hit a bullseye

A USB port allows you to hook up the Editor for deeper control over amp and effects parameters

Sounds

The THR10X might fancy itself as a high gain amp, and it can deliver on that, but there's a lot more tonal range on offer. Selecting one of the modes, but with the Gain low and Master high, you're presented with a cool, crisp clean tone, hinting at breakup when you dig in. Increasing the gain slowly will get you into stinging blues territory, and we spent a good deal of time on the Brown mode with gain at a little less than halfway, jamming along to old Black Crowes albums. The hi-fi heritage of Yamaha really comes through on the MP3 input, and playing along with the tracks sounds great, with none of the confusing balances that often spoil the experience on other practice amps.

When you do ramp up the gain the THR10X screams with menace and pushes out a decent amount of low end for something so small. Harmonics sing and the feedback at the end of notes is enough to make you believe you're playing through a 'real' amp. The effects add to the fun, with tremolos, delays, reverbs, phasers and flangers all sounding authentic and giving the tones depth and sparkle.

The volume remains quite low until around halfway; after that it can get up to a level that would have the neighbours sharpening their pitchforks. It never feels underpowered, and although it wouldn't stand up to a rock drummer, you could mic it up at a rehearsal and get a respectable tone.

Verdict

We like the THR10X. You instantly know how to use it, but it can keep surprising you the more you play it. Yamaha has really thought about what guitarists need at home, and with the THR range it's hit a bullseye. It's light, visually pleasing, sonically impressive, and just plain old damn fun to play – and doubles as a classy hi-fi into which you can plug your iPod or smartphone. Yes, for a few quid more you could pick up an excellent valve amp like the Laney VC15R or the Vox AC4C1, but do make time to play one of these little metal handbags of joy first. We think it might just get under your skin.

FINAL SCORE

YAMAHA THR10X	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**18**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**19**/20
TOTAL	**91%**

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TC ELECTRONIC

HOF Mini reverb

This brand-new micro-sized TC could be good for the space-strapped player who needs just one reverb sound. Review by **Marcus Leadley**

Input, output, a stomp switch and a single knob – the new Hall Of Fame Mini reverb all looks incredibly simple, until you spot the USB port. This pedal is 'TonePrint enabled', and though the HOF Mini comes ready-loaded with a single large hall reverb, there are number of ways you can change this sound. First, you download the TonePrint app to your Android or iPhone; second, choose one of the TonePrints (either basic, or celebrity-styled by the likes of Steve Vai, Paul Gilbert or Steve Morse); third, select the one you fancy hearing and transfer the algorithm to the pedal simply by holding your phone near a pickup. Alternatively, you can plug the pedal into a computer and do the same thing over USB. You can download all the default sounds of the original, full size, Hall Of Fame reverb pedal and for more flexibility you can also play with the reverb's parameters using the TonePrint software, and then load your modifications into the pedal.

Sounds

The HOF Mini's default reverb is basically a nice, warm large hall reverb that gets a bit chorussy when you wind the knob up: it's super-clean and good for doing Bill Frisell impersonations. A lot of the celebrity reverbs tend to be a bit, well, grand. The basic halls, plates, springs and rooms are generally more useful, and the added ability to edit means you can basically tailor the sound to your needs. The type of guitar reverb you choose for a track does a lot to define the era you're trying to conjure up, so if you like retro rock'n'roll or '80s stadium ambiences then the HOF Mini can deliver the goods on all fronts.

Verdict

Who is this pedal aimed at? The more fully-featured, larger format Hall Of Fame pedal has 10 presets on board and an eleventh patch for your download sound, and it's clearly aimed at the reverb aficionado who likes to work with different spaces in the live or recording environment. The HOF Mini seems to have been designed for someone with a very clear idea of a single extra reverb they want as an alternative to a basic amp reverb, or someone whose amp doesn't have reverb at all. It certainly works in both situations, and TC Electronics reverbs have a very good reputation, so the price is pretty good for a basic pro reverb. The connectivity and editability are both clever and well-implemented, but changing basic sounds takes a lot longer than simply twisting a knob. So for the live player the HOF Mini is basically the same as an amp reverb: on/off, more/less. If that's what you're looking for, it certainly does the job. TC Electronic also seems to have a type of player in mind for whom 'pedalboard real estate' is at a premium. Certainly, this unit has a very tiny footprint, but if space is so limited you could argue that it's simply time to build a new pedalboard.

Reverb does define an era, so if you like retro rock'n'roll or '80s ambiences then the TC HOF Mini can deliver the goods

FINAL SCORE	
TC HOF MINI	
Build quality	**17**/20
Versatility	**19**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Vibe	**17**/20
TOTAL	**89%**

FACTFILE

TC ELECTRONICS HOF MINI

DESCRIPTION **Teeny-weenie programmable reverb pedal, made in Denmark. Download TonePrint reverbs using you mobile phone or connect and edit using a computer.**
PRICE **£159**

FEATURES **Footswitch, Reverb level, USB port**

CONTACT **TC Electronic www.tcelectronic.com**

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MONTY'S GUITARS

Vintage-style pickups

Monty's might be a relatively new name on the replacement pickup scene, but this small-scale outfit in Richmond, Surrey already has a list of enthusiastic believers. Review by **Huw Price**

In a market that's almost saturated with pickup makers it has become increasingly hard to get noticed. Even so, some manage to stand out from the crowd, not because of slick advertising or a big marketing budget, but simply because players like them... and they spread the word.

This appears to be the case with Matt Gleeson of Monty's Guitars. He's based in London and some well-known players and guitar buffs have been raving about his products. Already his client list includes Simon Neil from Biffy Clyro, top US gun for hire Audley Freed, and pub rock legend Brinsley Schwarz. So when we got the chance to try a few sets, we couldn't turn them down.

Gleeson is a professional luthier who learned his trade with some of London's top guitar techs at Chandler Guitars. He gradually developed an interest in making pickups and after what's described as 'an age of testing, listening, tweaking, starting over, and tweaking again', Monty's Pickups were launched with Strat, Tele, P90 and humbucker sets.

The initial range of four sets has increased to eight, with vintage-style and hotter-wound options in each category. This month we're featuring four sets from the vintage end of the sonic spectrum, but these are not straightforward repros. Surprises may be in store...

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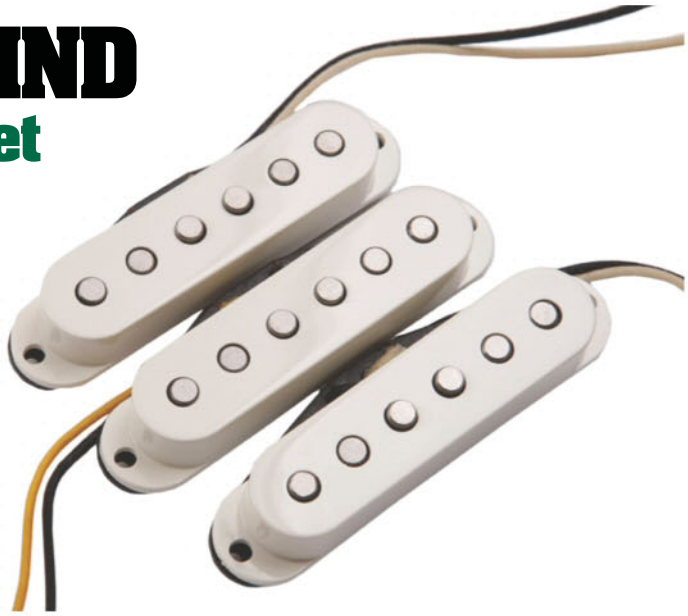
RETRO WIND
Stratocaster set



This set usually comes with a RWRP middle pickup for hum cancelling and flat rather than staggered polepieces, but the client had ordered staggered poles, and as a bespoke maker Gleeson will build sets to customer's preferred specs. Plain enamel magnet wire is preferred to early '60s spec Formvar. It's all 42 gauge copper but the insulating coating is different, and it's generally felt that the tone differs too.

Arriving installed in an early '80s Squier JV Stratocaster with a maple board and an alder body, the dynamic response of these pickups impressed us straight away. Despite the fact that all the DC readings were well below 6K, the tone seems closer to an early '60s Strat than our '54 replica. The output levels of the three pickups are very well-balanced and they manage to achieve clarity without excessive brightness. Single notes have plenty of beef behind them, along with a pleasingly vocal 'ooh' quality. In our experience plain enamel tends to have a thicker and more midrangey tonality, and this Monty's set runs true to type. Some players may yearn for a bit more of the glassiness and wiry treble that you can get from Formvar, in which case they could simply request a set wound with Formvar instead.

FACTFILE
RETRO WIND STRAT SET

DESCRIPTION **Vintage-wind Strat replacement set**
PRICE **£157.99 for the set or £61.50 individually**

MAGNETS **Alnico V**
WIRE **Plain enamel**
DC READINGS **5.5K, 5.5K & 5.7K (bridge)**

GOOD FOR **Fat and full-bodied early '60s style tones**
LOOK ELSEWHERE **Wirey and glassy early '50s sounds**

CONTACT **Monty's Guitars**
07921 916053
www.montysguitars.com

FINAL SCORE

RETRO WIND STRAT SET	
Sound	**18**/20
Build quality	**18**/20
Value	**18**/20
Dynamic response	**15**/20
TOTAL	**86%**

RETRO WIND
Telecaster Set

Described as 'pure vintage twang with a twist', this set comes with traditional cloth push-back wire like the rest and is wound with 42 gauge wire and built with Alnico III magnets; the middle position is hum-cancelling thanks to a reverse-wound neck pickup. Neck pickups can come with nickel, chrome or gold covers or even uncovered, if you prefer. Covers can also be grounded separately for trick wiring options.

The bridge doesn't have a grinding, rock oriented T-type tone by any means. Most of us will have suffered the 'stuck pig' squeal of a too-trebly Tele bridge pickup on occasion, but this set twangs and chimes without hurting your ears. Alnico III sounds rounder and sweeter, and it's an ideal choice when you need to knock off the harsher edges of Alnico V. The neck pickup – such a tricky position to get right – comes over like a cross between a regular Tele pickup and a low-wind Strat pickup. The muffled trebles have been opened up, but there's still a slightly fluffy, jazz-like quality to the mids that we rather like. Volume-wise these pickups balance very nicely, and the middle position has a softer attack with nice degree of phasey midrange scoop.

Compared to some '50s inspired sets the wound strings don't have as much snappy attack to our ears and the bridge's even response minimises quack, but the trade-off is a total absence of microphonic squeal. The fairly low output and precise, well-defined tone makes this set ideal for country, rockabilly and Travis picking.

FACTFILE
RETRO WIND TELE SET

DESCRIPTION **Low-wind Alnico III set for Teles**
PRICE **£160.99 for the set or £81.99 for the neck pickup and £91.99 for the bridge pickup individually**

MAGNETS **Alnico III**
WIRE **Plain enamel**
DC READINGS **5.5K & 6.6K (bridge)**

GOOD FOR **Well-balanced old school sounds with sweet trebles and some extra clarity from the neck**
LOOK ELSEWHERE **Hardcore '50s quack and overwound rock tones**

FINAL SCORE

RETRO WIND TELE SET	
Sound	**18**/20
Build quality	**18**/20
Value	**18**/20
Dynamic response	**17**/20
TOTAL	**89%**

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FACTFILE
J90 SET

DESCRIPTION **Low-output P90 replacements**
PRICE **£158.95 or £88 each**

MAGNETS **Alnico V**
WIRE **Plain enamel**
DC READINGS **7.7K (both)**

GOOD FOR **Properly balanced classic P90 tones for jazz, blues, roots rock and beyond**
LOOK ELSEWHERE **Massive output and growl and lots of amp-pushing power**

J90
P90 Set

Old guitars with P90s are wonderful things, but they come with a catch: the neck setting often overpowers the bridge. Various workarounds have been tried, including shimming the bridge pickup closer to the strings, or even winding it hotter, though some would say that putting an underwound P90 in the neck position is a smarter and more toneful solution.

Originally designed for use in the neck position of hollowbody guitars, the J90 is wound with plain enamel wire and loaded with an Alnico V magnet. Gleeson promises warm thick tones with less growl and additional clarity and treble. They work in the bridge position too, and they're available in dogear and soapbar guise with black or cream covers.

The test set arrived in an old SG Special. The bridge pickup drips vintage character, power chords roar with harmonic overtones and blues rock riffs have power, bite and a wiry snarl. Some manufacturers do go a bit over the top with bridge P90s but this one strikes just the right balance between power and chime. The neck is just as good, but sounds quite different; it's almost bell-like in an early Kenny Burrell sort of way, and there's a refreshing absence of muddiness. Single notes are beautifully rounded and have a pure, almost flutey quality that makes this particular SG very hard to put down.

FINAL SCORE	
J90 SET	
Sound	**19**/20
Build quality	**18**/20
Value	**19**/20
Dynamic response	**18**/20
TOTAL	**93%**

FACTFILE
HUMDINGER SET

DESCRIPTION **Vintage-style humbucker replacement set**
PRICE **£201.99 or £107.50 individually**

MAGNETS **Alnico V (neck) and Alnico II (bridge)**
WIRE **Plain enamel with unbalanced coils**
DC READINGS **7.3K (neck) & 7.8K (bridge)**

GOOD FOR **A full spectrum of nostalgic PAF tones**
LOOK ELSEWHERE **Shred metal tones with accompanying microphonic feedback**

HUMDINGER
Humbucker Set

Genuine Gibson humbuckers from the 1950s have achieved super-desirable status but the prosaic truth is that during that golden period the company probably used whatever type of Alnico they could get hold of – and that's why opinions differ on the 'authentic' grade for PAFs. Gleeson has opted for Alnico II and V in the bridge and neck respectively, and he chooses to slightly weaken the sand-cast magnets. Though he wax-pots the plain enamel coils, we found the bridge Humdinger, while squeal-free, to be more microphonic.

The bridge has throaty low mids and plenty of clarity without veering too far towards brightness. Single notes are full-bodied, power chords are solid and the low strings growl while retaining focus. The neck pickup shares the bridge unit's clarity and definition, but it's a sweeter ride. Equally characterful, single notes on our test guitar have a rounded vocal quality that sound almost like an ES-335. Similarly, the midrange and bass have a woodiness that veers towards old-school jazz tones when the amp is set clean. Due to the contrasting but complementary tones of the bridge and neck settings, the middle position has a voice of its own that combines the best of both. It's bright but mellow and smooth, yet responsive, and these humbuckers stay open and lively when you turn down the volume controls – even without '50s-type wiring.

FINAL SCORE	
HUMDINGER SET	
Sound	**19**/20
Build quality	**18**/20
Value	**19**/20
Dynamic response	**19**/20
TOTAL	**94%**

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PJB DOUBLE FOUR

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Switchable High/Low Gain Input : Gain : 3 Band EQ : Master Volume
Aux Input with Level Control
Headphone Out : Line Out (To Recorder or PJB Active Cabinet)
Dimensions - 208 x 203 x 172 mm : Weight - 4Kg
Available Colours - Black : Red : Vintage White

OMG!! The DOUBLE FOUR is unbelievable! It sounds so big and warm and beautiful. Congratulations! - Nathan East:NAMM 2013

The rear of the DOUBLE FOUR showing the RALFR Port Array

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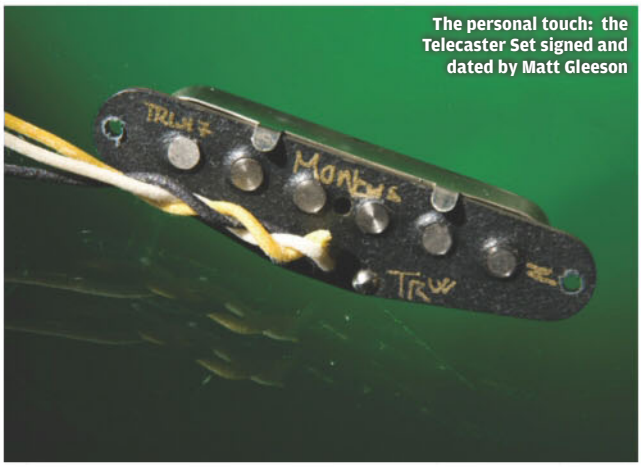
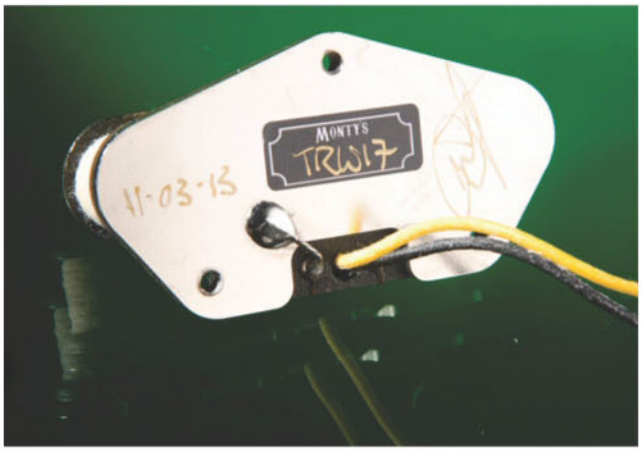


The personal touch: the Telecaster Set signed and dated by Matt Gleeson



Verdict

There's a vast array of choice out there when it comes to replacement pickups, from the much-touted big American names to lesser-sung UK builders who can offer equally great quality plus the personal touch. Pickups aren't magic: makers work with a limited range of materials, so the real craftsman is the one who understands how to match ingredients and manipulate wire tension, winding style and potting to achieve specific results.

Matt Gleeson clearly knows exactly what he's about. Many boutique makers tend to stick to well-proven combinations, so it's interesting that he's unafraid to depart from convention when he feels it will produce a specific result that the player wants. Consequently, the sets we tried delivered classic tones without the compromises that sometimes come as part of the deal with slavishly accurate vintage reproductions.

The Strat set was very smooth, classy and refined, with plenty of character in each position and some fabulously funky in-between sounds. Excellent.

The bridge pickup of the Tele set may not satisfy hardcore Tele purists, but its softer treble combined with the clearer than usual neck unit makes for a more generally usable combination.

As for the J90s, we tested them against a pair of original P90s in a 1961 Gibson ES-330 and let's just say that the originals came off second-best. It's pretty hard to give a better recommendation than that.

Finally, the Humdingers are real players' PAFs because they're capable of going from a whisper to a roar, depending on the strength of your picking. They allowed us to drag a full range of great Les Paul tones from a fairly uninspiring test guitar, so Kossoff and Peter Green fans should certainly consider checking them out.

These Monty's Guitars pickups delivered classic tones without the compromises that come with slavishly accurate repros

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TAKAMINE P7DC

Takamine rejigged its range in 2013, essentially absorbing the Nashvilles into the new Pro Series 7 line with solid spruce over rosewood plus the CTP-2 valve preamp. Review by **Rick Batey**

When Takamines arrived on the mainstream scene in the mid-'70s, they were lifesavers for working musos. Before then, the only really practical off-the-shelf electro-acoustics had been Ovations, but the revolutionary bowlback design was not to everyone's taste. Takamines were essentially mid-range Martin copies, sturdily built by a Japanese team who obviously knew their onions, with a genuinely useable built-in pickup system – and in those days of low-fi soundhole magnetics and problematic stick-on bugs, that instant plug-in-ability really was a revelation.

The current Takamine Pro Series 7 guitars roost near the top of the company's tree, just below the Signature Series and the annual Limited Editions. There are four models: a cutaway NEX, a slightly larger jumbo cutaway, a standard dreadnought, and our review subject this month – the Venetian cutaway P7DC dreadnought.

Befitting its high-end £2000-plus price tag, this Takamine is a luxury ride, and no mistake. The top is solid sitka spruce, extremely close-grained with lots of silky medullary lines, backed by hand-scalloped X-bracing. The back and sides are perfectly matched solid Indian rosewood, dark and evenly striped – it's top-grade stuff. The top, back, fingerboard and headstock are all bound in maple, the back has a maple centre-stripe, and the top binding has an extra inner layer of an exotic reddish-coloured wood, possibly pernambuco or dyed mahogany. The front is topped off by a soundhole ring in blue and green abalone, and even the pickguard stands out as a feature of real quality with its soft, swirly, '50s-style tortoiseshell pattern.

The neck is one-piece mahogany, with a rosewood-faced headstock carrying gold-plated sealed tuners, and an ebony fingerboard with ornate snowflake markers in abalone. It's a good deal wider than you ➔

Solid rosewood, real maple binding and an impeccable gloss finish all over

One-piece African mahogany neck and gold tuners

Befitting its high-end price, the P7DC is a luxury ride with a sitka top, rosewood back and sides and a CoolTube preamp

FACTFILE
Takamine P7DC

DESCRIPTION **Cutaway electro-acoustic guitar. Made in Japan**
PRICE **£2232 inc. hard case**

BUILD **Solid spruce top with scalloped X-bracing, solid Indian rosewood back and sides, maple binding. Maple-bound mahogany neck with 20-fret ebony fingerboard. Rosewood bridge with split bone saddle, bone nut, gold-plated diecast tuners, neck heel strap button**
ELECTRICS **Palathetic undersaddle pickup. CTP-2 Cool Tube preamp with three-band EQ with semi-parametric midrange and onboard tuner**
LEFT-HANDERS **No**
FINISH **All-gloss**

SCALE LENGTH
643mm/25.3"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 45mm
12th fret 54.5mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 22.5mm
10th fret 25mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 38mm
Bridge 55mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.0mm
12th fret bass 2.0mm
WEIGHT **2.45kg/5.4lb**

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RRP **£2249**

Martin
DCPA1
Martin's Performing Artist guitars work superbly both acoustically and plugged in. This is their rosewood/spruce cutaway dread, with a Fishman F1 Aura set up
RRP **£2899**

might expect from a Japanese-built dreadnought, measuring 45mm at the nut – which in old money is exactly halfway between 1 3/4" and 1 13/16". Up at the 12th fret the neck measures 45.5mm across, and this all adds up to a fair old handful. Takamine uses an asymmetric C-shaped neck profile which makes the neck slightly thinner on the treble side. It's an unusual but subtle feature; some players might not even notice it unless told, while others may find it hard to get used to. Our review model could use a touch more fingerboard relief as the neck is almost dead flat and the D string can be made to buzz by digging in, but that's just a settling-down thing, and overall the standard of fretting is as neat as the build of the rest of the guitar.

The rosewood bridge is fitted with Takamine's long-established Palathetic pickup system with six individual piezo elements, one for each string, and this is linked to a CTP-2 CoolTube preamp mounted on the upper bass shoulder. It's a fairly hefty unit as it incorporates a 12AU7 valve running at a low voltage to inject an element of goodly even-order harmonics into the tone.

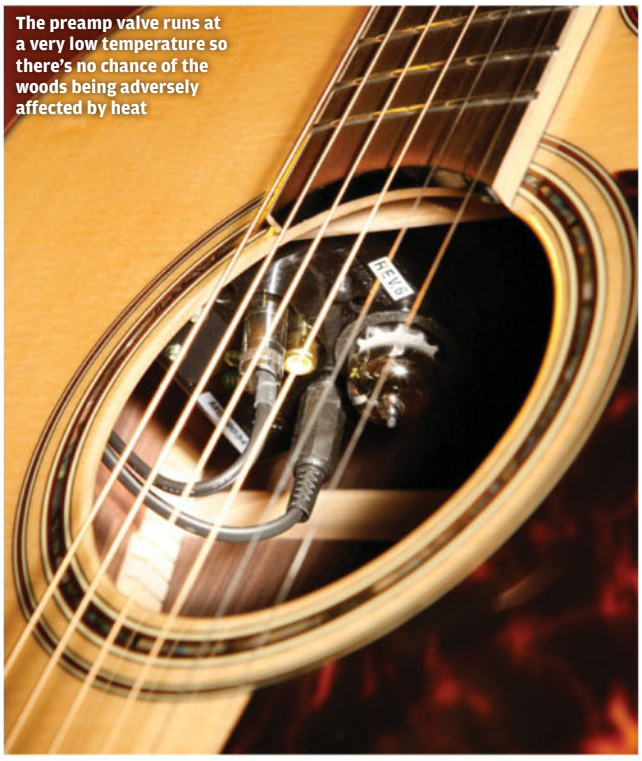
In terms of controls the preamp is very well-equipped, with a volume slider, a three-band EQ complete with a semi-parametric midrange knob, a mixer knob for the CoolTube feature, a tuner, and a separate volume knob in case you wish to add a second pickup to create your own dual-source system... although unfortunately there's no way of EQ-ing the two sources before blending, which would be a disadvantage. The entire tuner unit slides out neatly and easily to reveal four AA batteries which are likely to have a somewhat shorter lifespan than on any regular non-tube preamp.

The CTP-2 preamp uses a real valve and takes four AA batteries

The six Palathetic piezos are designed to sense some top vibration as well as direct string pressure and yet the system does come over as essentially in the undersaddle transducer camp in terms of overall response, with the usual advantage of high resistance to feedback but, in this case, particularly fine string-to-string volume. The EQ bands are well chosen and the ability to tweak the frequency of the midrange slider is a real boon.

The CoolTube knob gradually dials in a very likeable sense of added richness and body and also seems to slightly ease that piezo-y attack, and we found our a sweet spot at around one o'clock on the dial. We'd definitely leave that knob set there all the time: it's a feature that makes a real difference.

The CoolTube knob gradually dials in a likeable sense of warmth. It's a fine feature, at the expense of battery life


The preamp valve runs at a very low temperature so there's no chance of the woods being adversely affected by heat

Sounds

The P7DC is an impeccably well-mannered dreadnought, with a soft attack and a rich, lush sound packed with chiming, rosewoody overtones. Instinctively you just want to strum it with a light pick to get the most out of all that plush complexity, and in fact you might say that this where this guitar really excels, as a classy-sounding rhythm device: it's a very good singer's guitar, if you like, which is no bad thing. Swapping to single-string stuff, there isn't perhaps the mid thump and depth to excite a dedicated Martin lover, but it's clear and balanced across the fingerboard and overall it does a clear and precise-sounding job.

With bare fingers you get the feeling that naturally enough this very new guitar still has some opening up to do, but it's sweet, and the dynamics are more responsive than the weight of the guitar leads you to expect. It sounds precise and in-tune, and would most likely be an easy guitar to record.

Verdict

Plush and efficient, that's the Takamine P7DC. It's extremely well-built, the materials are top-notch, and the CoolTube unit is a fine contender in the high-end preamp bracket. It is a slightly heavy guitar thanks to the preamp and batteries and that full-feeling neck is a very acquired taste, but if you like a wider nut and you want an practical stage instrument that combines outward tradition with a well-balanced UST system that sounds very good indeed, this guitar is hard to fault.

FINAL SCORE

TAKAMINE P7DC	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**17**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**15**/20
Looks	**18**/20
TOTAL	**86%**

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CARVIN

PB4 Classic Bolt-Neck Bass

Carvin's new generation of basses is led by the PB4, which combines modern features with a trad look – and you can pick and choose from a ton of upgrades to personalise the outcome. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

The LC Kiesel Company was founded in California in 1946 and was re-christened Carvin in 1949 – a name derived from a composite of the names of Kiesel's sons, Carson and Gavin. From the '50s to the early '70s they manufactured guitars and basses largely from bodies and necks made by Hofner, graduating to producing their own parts and components towards the end of the '70s. During this period they became the first USA manufacturer to sell directly to the public, and in the 1980s they began offering customers the opportunity to personalise their instrument via various custom options. Lowell's son, Mark Kiesel has been designing the guitar and bass models for Carvin since 1971. Mark's son Jeff Kiesel designed the PB bass series and this is the first instrument design from the 3rd generation Kiesel Family.

The standard Carvin bass design is sleek, modern with neck-through construction and much use of handsome timber, but the new PB4 is the company's take on the time-honoured Fender Precision. It's far from an exact copy, though. The solid alder body has been subjected to a subtle re-imagining, especially around the waist and the outward-pointing horns; it's curvaceous and rather sexy. There's a slight forearm chamfer on the upper bout and a more generous ribcage provision along the top rear edge. The three-ply white/black/white scratchplate has been altered too; it's a swoopy design, especially above the pickup, perhaps a touch more Jazz than Precision, and though it provides a bed for the controls it doesn't hold the jack socket in the same way as the Fender original, instead siting it – for improved comfort, says Carvin – on the bottom corner. A scalloped heel provides improved playability above the 17th fret.

Maple board and fretless models are an option. There's also the five-string PB5

Semi reverse-style headstock with sealed tuners

The standard Carvin bass is sleek and modern but the PB4 is a re-imagining of the time-honoured Fender Precision

For the neck Carvin uses Eastern hard rock maple that's finished with tung oil, rather than varnish, for 'smooth, fast playing' and they've gone for a modern neck profile that is 'between P and Jazz-style necks'. It feels snug and comfy under the hand and plays very swiftly. The string spacing of 10mm at the precision-cut, smooth-flowing graphite-teflon nut imbues the PB4 with P/J hybrid status, rather like Fender's Mark Hoppus signature model. ➔

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FACTFILE

CARVIN PB4 CLASSIC BOLT-NECK PASSIVE BASS

DESCRIPTION **Solidbody bass. Made in USA**
PRICE **£912**

BUILD **Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 20 medium jumbo nickel frets on a rosewood fingerboard. Carvin Premium 20:1 tuners and Carvin optional string-through bridge. Chrome hardware**
ELECTRICS **Passive with one SCP Alnico split-coil humbucking pickup, one Volume and one Tone control**
LEFT-HANDERS **Yes, at no extra cost**
FINISHES **Many and varied – see website**
RANGE OPTIONS **PB5 5-string £981, fretless and leftie versions of both at same price. Many custom options for all models, from black hardware (£30) to a koa neck and body (£388). Optional 18V active electronics can be added: offers a push pull passive/active tone control (by pulling up on the tone control the bass goes into passive mode) Bass cut and boost, Treble cut and boost (£69).**

SCALE LENGTH
864mm/34"
NECK WIDTH
Nut 38.5mm
12th fret 57mm
DEPTH OF NECK
First fret 19mm
12th fret 22.5mm
STRING SPACING
Nut 10mm
Bridge 19.5mm
ACTION AS SUPPLIED
12th fret treble 2.0mm
12th fret bass 2.5mm
WEIGHT **3.82/8.44lbs**

CONTACT **RockStarGuitar**
0121 439 9662
www.carvinworld.com

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Classic Series '50s Precision
Now with a lacquer finish, the Mexican-made RI is a fine workhorse. The black/anodised gold scratchplate combination looks killer
RRP **£862**

Sandberg
California VS
A clever modernisation with a six-bolt neck and active/passive switching. Looks like a dream and sounds the business
RRP **£1052**

While the neck feels like a Jazz Bass, the headstock is considerably smaller, with a more modernised leaning. Its face is unfinished for 'that classic look', says Carvin, and displays the unfussy company logo and three-ply black/white/black plastic trussrod access cover. Four chrome Carvin Premium 20:1 closed-gear tuners with small triangular buttons line up along the top edge. There's no string tree, but none is needed as Carvin has chosen to generate downwards pressure by tilting the headstock backwards.

The rosewood fingerboard carries 20 medium jumbo nickel frets, perfectly seated with no overhang at the tang. White dot inlays adorn the face of the fingerboard and another set lies along the top edge. Interestingly, Carvin haven't gone for the rolled edges you'll find on many traditional fingerboards, opting for a more abrupt, squared-off transition between face and edge.

Back on the body you'll find a Carvin bridge; it's of the string-through-body variety although the strings don't run all the way through to the back, being rooted just beneath the base of the bridge. The bridge itself is Carvin's own design with locking saddles.

The PB4 is not endowed with active electronics – it wouldn't be the traditional P-type bass that it purports to be if it were. You get one very familiar-looking Carvin SCP split coil humbucker with a single, hefty Alnico V magnet – a build detail that, says Carvin, means 'you won't get any signal drop off like you do from a conventional P-type pickup if the strings are not perfectly centred between the polepieces' –which is thoughtful. As we intimated above, controls number the standard duo of volume and master tone, which come in the form of knurled chrome knobs.

The SPC split-coil humbucker carries Alnico V bar magnets for even string-to-string volume

Sounds

As always with a passive bass with straightforward controls, we started our voyage of discovery with the tone control on full treble. The split-coil humbucker has a high-quality sound with good width and the bottom end that carries plenty of growling intent, most evident on the E and A strings, and a nice rasp as you move across the fingerboard. The midrange is even without any nasal bias, giving an air of solidity and plenty of punch and impact. The sound is detailed with plenty of harmonics so the highs are crisp, clean and well-realised. Overall, it's a clear-sounding bass for this pickup type, and the lively tone will find favour with rockers and its edginess will suit contemporary pop as well.

There's not a lot of variation on offer. When you back off the tone control not much happens for about the first half-turn, but then you start to get subtle reductions to the spiky note edge, which does add some versatility – you'll automatically start hitting old soul or blues grooves. With the tone control backed off three-quarters of the way the PB becomes a very smooth-sounding beast. The E string still growls, albeit without the raspy, gunning quality of the flat-out setting; definition and punch are still excellent, but it's nowhere near as aggressive. Again, excellent for retro soul, rock and blues, but also pretty decent for poppier applications.

With subtle tweaks to the classic template and intelligent component upgrades, the PB4 is a definite success

Steeply chamfered heel makes the most of the traditional neck joint

Verdict

Carvin's take on this old design, with subtle, well-thought out tweaks to the classic template and intelligent upgrades of components, is a definite success. The PB4 is a high-quality humbucker-equipped passive bass, custom-built to exacting standards in the USA, and the basic version comes in at under £1000. Whether players will prefer it to the long-standing ruler of this domain is open to question; the Fender Precision has, after all, more than stood the test of time... but with the PB4 Carvin has added another bass to the list of 'must try' alternatives. And remember that if you like the PB, all that we've described – save the body shape – can be altered to suit you. Of course, altering the specs raises the price (for instance, gold hardware costs £50 more and a flame maple top comes in at £195) and delivery time is at least 10 weeks. But if you can find one to try – an issue with Carvin gear – then you might just find the bass of your dreams.

FINAL SCORE

CARVIN PB4 CLASSIC BOLT-NECK BASS	
Build Quality	**19**/20
Playability	**19**/20
Sound	**17**/20
Value for money	**18**/20
Looks	**16**/20
TOTAL	**89%**

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EBS
Classic Session 120

This new 120W Chinese-made tilt-back combo is designed for smaller rehearsals or monitor use, or even bigger gigs with PA help, and it offers a lot of sound for its size and price. Review by **Gareth Morgan**

FACTFILE
EBS CLASSIC SESSION 120 BASS COMBO

DESCRIPTION **Single channel 120W 1x12" transistor combo. 12" speaker and 2" piezo tweeter. 18mm tilt-back MDF cabinet (front baffle 25mm) with front porting. Made in China**
PRICE **£399**

CONTROLS **Gain, Bass, Middle, Mid Frequency, Treble, Aux In (level) and Volume controls; Character and Ground/Lift switches; input and phones sockets, stereo phono sockets and XLR balanced DI out**
RANGE OPTIONS **Session 30 30W 1x8" combo, £149; Session 60 60W 1x10" combo with tweeter, £249**

DIMENSIONS **450mm high, 402mm wide, 437mm deep**
WEIGHT **21.3kg/47lbs**

CONTACT **Sound Technology 01462 480000 www.soundtech.co.uk**

The first-ever EBS product, the EBS-1 bass preamp of 1988, was made in a basement in Stockholm by the two company founders, Bo Engberg and Mats Kristoffersson (no relation to Kris, alas). Both were semi-pro bass players with an interest in electronics, although Kristoffersson was the more design-oriented of the two, and both were passionate about making top-notch bass gear. That same year at the Frankfurt show they met Hershel Blankenship, an American entrepreneur who ran an exclusive business in LA assembling high-spec rack systems, and amongst the first players to receive an EBS-1 was the Red Hot Chili Peppers' Flea – a huge break for the fledgling company.

Since then the story has been one of an ever-expanding product line which includes effects pedals (the first being the OctaBass octave pedal in 1993), power amps and speaker cabinets. In 1993 they produced their first combo, the Taurus 240; the first head, a high-powered all-valve affair called Fafner, followed three years later. Today, Engberg and Kristoffersson still run the company, although production and assembly has moved from a Stockholm basement to other independent firms in Sweden and also cheaper Asian productions centres. This month we're reviewing the Chinese-made Classic Session 120 combo.

The parametric mid section works well, the Character switch less so

The EBS looks smart but the 47lb payload and the single top-mounted handle recall more back-breaking times

The CS120 is a squat box standing 450mm high, 437mm deep and 401mm wide, but with a slot enabling you to position it flat or tilted back in monitor style. The smart, mottled black vinyl exterior has metal corners and two sets of rubber feet and it's built from 18mm MDF, which always sounds a little cheap but in fact has excellent bass cabinet-friendly properties including consistency of strength and flexibility. Still, the choice of MDF does create a payload of 21kg/47lbs), which in today's climate of reduced weight bass gear recalls more halcyon, back-breaking times, and while the single top-mounted strap does its job adequately, a pair of side-mounted handles would have been a better option.

The mottled black/silver grille has white piping and hides one 12" speaker and a 2" piezo tweeter on a 25mm MDF baffle. All we know is that the speakers are made in China, the 12"" being 'developed especially for this combo' and rated at 150W. There's a circular port bottom left, through which acoustic foam is visible. There seems to have been a slight lack of attention to detail during the build process ➔

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Ampeg's baby is a fun little package and a bit more versatile than you'd think. The cab contains two 10" Eminence speakers, there's 100W of power and lots to smile about tonally courtesy of a simple but highly effective EQ
RRP **£435**

Peavey
MAX 112 Combo
Well-regarded 200W 1x12" tweeterless affair that's compact and portable with a well thought-out EQ. Comes with gain boost, a tuner and 'psycho-acoustic' low end enhancement too
RRP **£289**

as the vinyl is coming away from the MDF in three or four places, and there are issues with the fitting of the grille-securing Velcro strips.

The black control panel is dominated by a line of chunky black knobs very much in keeping with the 'Classic' name. Next to the input jack you'll find a Gain knob with a white Character button: this accesses a 'scooped mids' pre-shape with boosted bass and treble and a midrange cut. There are three tone controls, with Bass (+/-15dB @ 100Hz) and Treble (+/-15dB @ 10kHz) flanking the midrange controls. Here, the smaller of the two controls selects a point between 150Hz and 3.3kHz (only the top, middle and bottom frequencies are marked) while the larger one controls 15dB of cut or boost.

The Aux In section comprises a pair of phono sockets and a level control which allows for blending of any audio source for practice use. As well as Master Volume, there's also a headphone socket and balanced output of the XLR variety with Ground/Lift switch.

The tweeter has no level control but it's well-judged and sounds fine

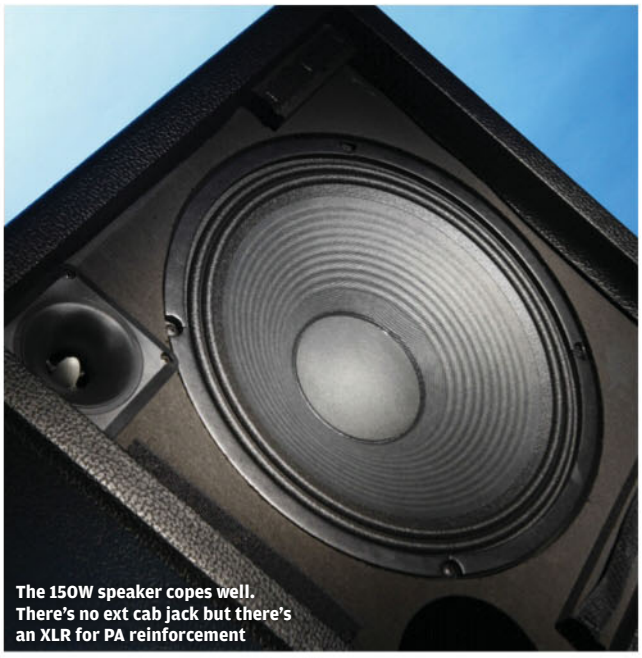
Sounds

The CS120's amp section – like its predecessor the CS60 – is pretty much a scaled-down version of the EBS Classic 450 head, which bodes well. There's no active/passive switch, so you need to take care with the Gain level. You could start by depressing the Character switch and stepping onto Scooped Mids Street, but unless you're into reduced definition and punch and that annoying glassy sound, we wouldn't recommend it as the result is a rubbish bass sound.

Leaving that switch well alone, the EBS delivers a pleasing noise and a fair reproduction of your bass' acoustic tone, albeit with an added chunk of cabinet-induced bottom end. It deals with a five-string's low B well – no distortion, excellent definition and a decent booty level. The core of the note is solid and punchy with plenty of impact, and as you move across the fingerboard your bass will speak sweetly. We're not really fans of a horns without a horn level control, but while it definitely a induces a metallic zing into proceedings on the thinner strings EBS have got the attenuation almost spot-on and the overall impression is one of clean, crisp clarity with snappy bite on offer if you make an effort.

So the flat EQ sound is good and it doesn't get any worse when you dial in added bass, the CS120 taking as much as you're prepared to throw at it without overload, filling space and sounding big, fat and, best of all, defined. If the horn enhancement is still too clanky for you, chopping back treble is a way to reduce that; this sands down the burrs from your note edges, creating a more old-fashioned sound, without removing all the shape from your note. If you want nasty and noisy, just wind the Treble knob to anywhere from half-boost upwards and you'll get more finger click and clanky fret-noise than you'll know what to do with. As for the midrange, the parametric selector is genuinely useful. Turn it to the left for dark punchiness; move it towards the 500Hz centre for more rasp with a gunning, barky quality at the bottom end and more presence and stature – a good place for competing with multiple guitars. Boosting level is brighter on the clockwise side and while there's a slight diminution of bass end, the sound is fat enough. You can find the classic burpy tone between about one and four o'clock but this is, again, a well-attenuated control so it feels like an element that contributes to the whole tone rather than one which overruns and ransacks it.

The lack of power or extension cab capability limits its stage usefulness but this is a compact, good-sounding unit


The 150W speaker copes well. There's no ext cab jack but there's an XLR for PA reinforcement

Verdict

The EBS Classic Session 120 is a good little unit. It's compact and delivers a good variety of sounds via the straightforward, musical EQ. Stylistically it'll get you anywhere you seek to go, although the power and volume on offer and lack of extension cab capability limits its usage in loud stage situations. There are negative points, especially in the payload department; 21kg is a touch on the heavy side in the current environment – but £399 isn't too expensive, the tilt-back facility is useful, and the cool, classy look makes it quite an appealing little package.

FINAL SCORE

EBS CLASSIC SESSION 120 COMBO	
Build Quality	**18**/20
Playability	**16**/20
Sound	**18**/20
Value for money	**16**/20
Looks	**16**/20
TOTAL	**84%**

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HOOKED ON CLASSICS

MOVING AND GROOVIN'

It's a cliché, sure, but having all the guitars doesn't make you a better player. Sometimes, decides **Phil Harris**, you need to strip everything back and try to rediscover that essence that got you into playing guitar in the first place

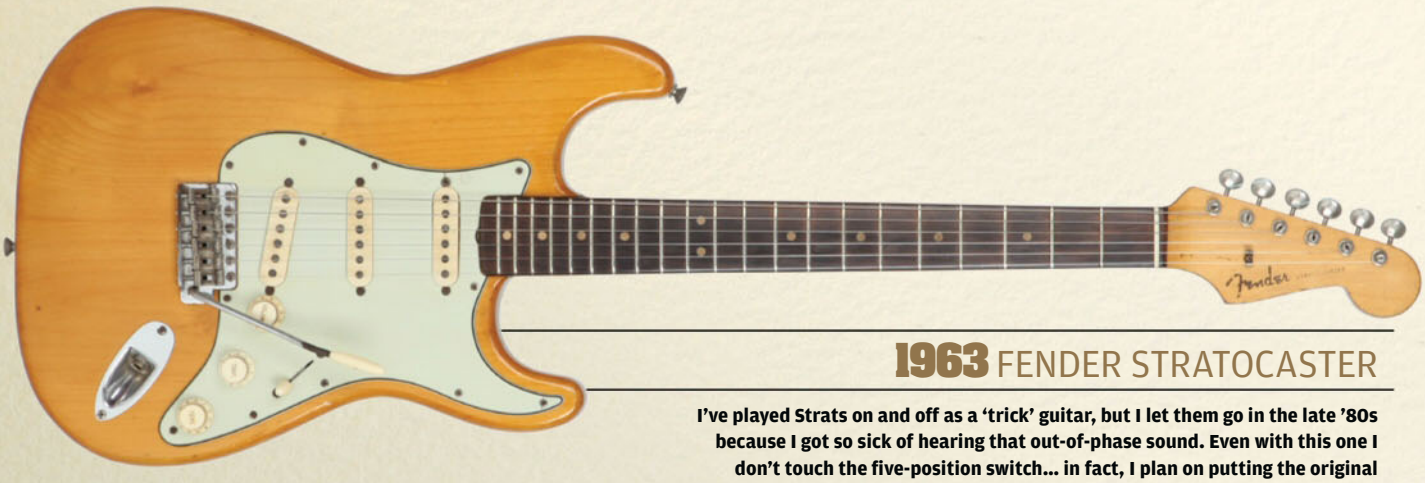
Once you've been playing for as many years as I have, you'll know that one of the great things about guitar playing – and music in general – is that you're never done. However, life does get in the way, and even someone like myself who is lucky enough to work with guitars can find it easy to go for spells without doing anything apart from the odd bit of noodling. I did a little bit of playing gigs about 10 years ago and decided to knock it on the head, but a while back I was doing a little demo. One of the tracks I was doing was the classic *Need Your Love So Bad* and I had all the right gear, but it seemed obvious when I was listening to it back that I really hadn't got into the mindset and understood the type of playing you hear Peter Green doing on the original. Now, I've always made a point of being inspired by my heroes rather than just copying them. I've always been too lazy to learn the original parts, anyway – and it interests more to take what those legends did and allow the spirit of them to inspire you. So my early New Year's resolution has been to take this inspiration from Peter Green and explore clean guitar, playing some sweet riffs, and really thinking about what I'm playing. Rather than playing a lot of notes, I want to get better at being economical and deciding what to leave out.

'I had all the right gear, but it suddenly seemed obvious that I hadn't really got into the mindset'

I'm not claiming to be reinventing the wheel in any way. For theory fans, I'm playing some blues in A7, B7, E7, incorporating little fills linking the chord work, and let things linger rather than just filling the space and clipping notes and throwing in harmonics. My practise schedule? Nothing cleverer than playing every minute I'm not working or spending time with family. I know, having been a professional player, that you need to put the hours in to have any chance of getting your rewards as a musician. I've even had to keep my nails in line for the first time in my life. When you're playing a million miles an hour with distortion, you can have barnacles on your fingers. Now, everything is noticeable – and I now have to worry about my cuticles.

I can already hear and feel the difference... playing without the fear of leaving notes out. I think if I could back and jump into a 25-year-old Phil Harris's body I'd wipe the floor with my younger self, given the knowledge and judgement I have now.

With this mission in mind I've been concentrating on playing instruments that are going to get me to where I want to be. Some of them are old favourites, some are things I've never really bothered with before.



1963 FENDER STRATOCASTER

I've played Strats on and off as a 'trick' guitar, but I let them go in the late '80s because I got so sick of hearing that out-of-phase sound. Even with this one I don't touch the five-position switch... in fact, I plan on putting the original three-way switch back in. This Strat, a refin, demands my respect – and it gets it

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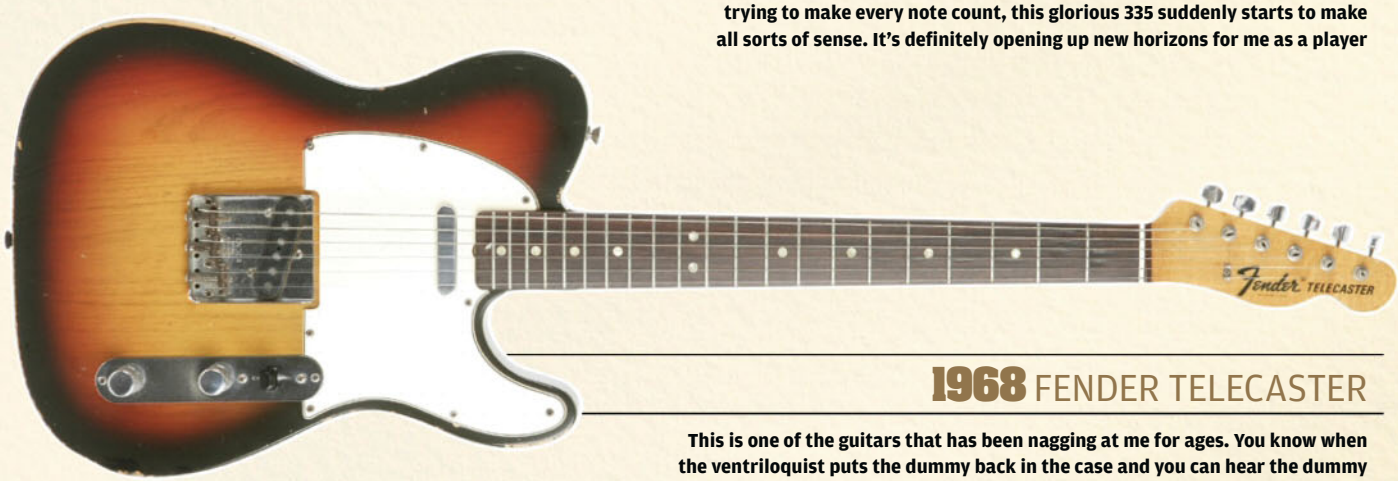
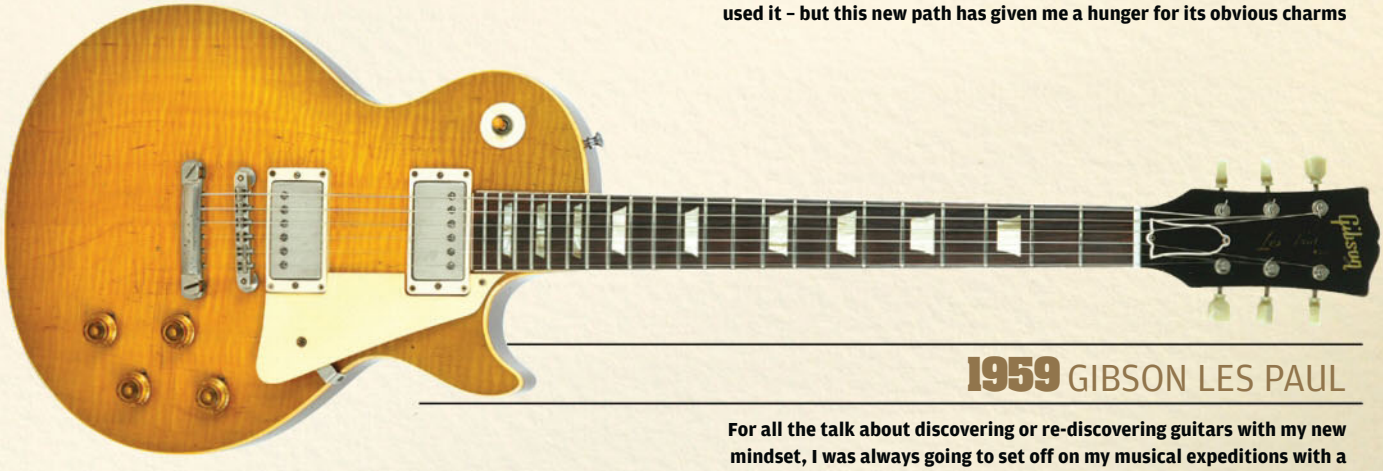
1963 GIBSON ES-335

I've never really played semi-acoustics in anger, due to feedback issues among other things. But when you're learning to play economically and trying to make every note count, this glorious 335 suddenly starts to make all sorts of sense. It's definitely opening up new horizons for me as a player



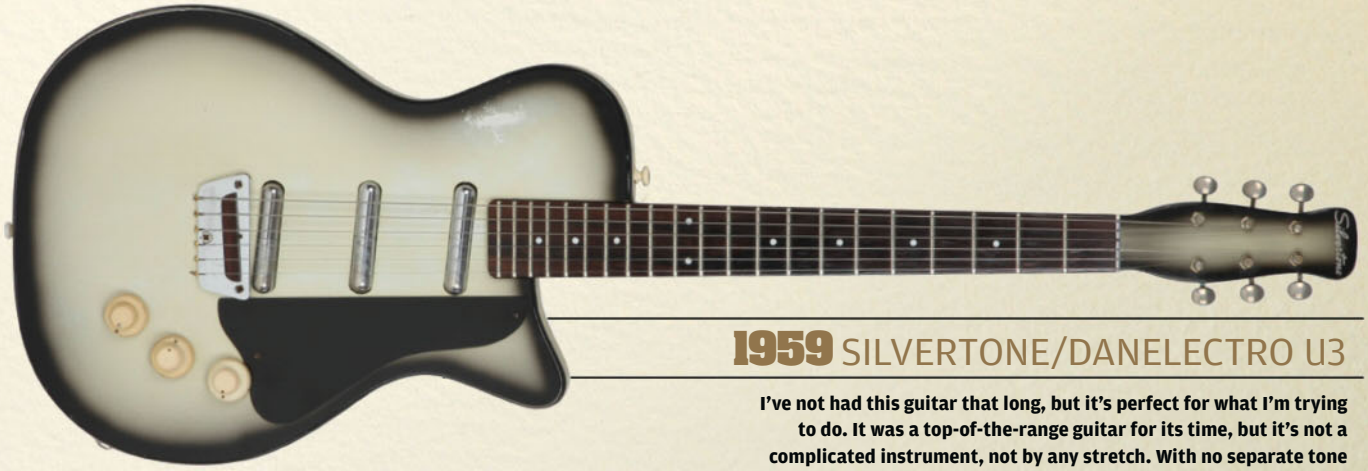
1968 FENDER TELECASTER

This is one of the guitars that has been nagging at me for ages. You know when the ventriloquist puts the dummy back in the case and you can hear the dummy go 'Let me out!' It's like that. I've had this pre-CBS guitar for 30 years and never used it – but this new path has given me a hunger for its obvious charms



1959 GIBSON LES PAUL

For all the talk about discovering or re-discovering guitars with my new mindset, I was always going to set off on my musical expeditions with a Gibson Les Paul. For me it's just like coming home, and it's also the guitar that allows me to easily chart any progress I make



1959 SILVERTONE/DANELECTRO U3

I've not had this guitar that long, but it's perfect for what I'm trying to do. It was a top-of-the-range guitar for its time, but it's not a complicated instrument, not by any stretch. With no separate tone control, you have to mix the pickups to get different sounds

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Great PRETENDER

A player with the depth, class and versatility of Robbie McIntosh, one the country's most-respected guitarists, needs a selection of instruments to match. Lars Mullen drops by to examine the evidence

Check out the biography of Robbie McIntosh and you'll be amazed at the vast list of high-profile musicians this extremely talented guitarist has recorded or toured with. Kirsty MacColl, George Martin, Nine Below Zero, Roger Daltrey, Gordon Haskell, Joe Cocker, Talk Talk, Mark Knopfler, Tori Amos, Paul McCartney, Gordon Haskell, Paul Carrick, Robert Palmer, John Mayer, Thea Gilmore, Carl Carlton, Sinead O'Connor, Tom Jones, Norah Jones, the Pretenders... and that's not the whole list, not by a long chalk.

'I've had a lot of guitars over the years,' says Robbie. 'I've had old ones, and I've had new ones! Mostly, though, with electrics, it's been all about single-coil pickups for me. They're nice and versatile and, for me, they just work. You need that practicality when you're playing with a lot of diverse artists.

'When I was a youngster, my main influences were blues players. I spent hours listened to the likes of Blind Boy Fuller, Mississippi John Hurt, Albert King, Otis Rush, and Albert Collins. I also had two older sisters who were also into everything from the Beatles to Jimi Hendrix and Bob Dylan to Leonard Cohen. Out of all that came the ability to fingerpick and also to do slide work, and that really helped when it comes to slotting in with most bands in a variety of styles, both live and in the studio.

'There are still many guitars I'd like to own, but the ones I have now are all chosen for their individual sounds and are there to be used when the need arises. It's nice to have the choice, and all these acoustic guitars, the resonators and the electrics respond in their own way. Most of them are

1970 Les Paul Deluxe with mini humbuckers, refinished in gold

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featured on my new album, *Turn Up For The Books*. There's 14 tracks on there, so I had plenty of room to air them all.'

Born to a musical family – his father was heavily into jazz and his mother played the piano – Robbie began thrashing out guitar chords at the grand old age of eight. 'I was getting on fine comfortably noodling along at home, but when I was 13 years old, my mum insisted I had classical guitar lessons, which I really enjoyed. I passed the exams up to Grade 8. My first insight to playing guitar live was in an outfit called 70% Proof, which was a really tight little school band playing songs by bands like the Who, Free and Humble Pie.

'I really wanted to go to music college, but it was a bit of a catch 22. To be enrolled into the Royal College Of Music, for example, you had to have at least Grade 5 on the piano to be accepted, no matter what your main instrument was. So I didn't go. Instead I failed my A levels, and joined a band called the Foster Brothers.

'We toured and recorded for about a year in the late '70s. It was the same circuit that people like the Dammed and the Sex Pistols started out on when punk took off. We suddenly became out of step with what was fashionable at the time, and like a lot of players from my era I just didn't want to play with one finger and go around gobbing on people. I had a Gibson L6S in that band, but all the gear got nicked! Luckily the record company, Rocket Records, bought us new equipment, but we had to give it all back as we parted company soon afterwards.

'I've never really done anything else but play guitar. I did have a little lorry driving job delivering sand and cement for a few weeks, but then I got a call from Chris Thompson, who was in Manfred Mann's Earth Band, asking me to join as lead guitarist in his band Filthy McNasty. Next thing I knew we were in LA with the new name of Night, and we toured the USA as support for the Doobie Brothers throughout 1979, during which time I picked up this 1970 Les Paul Deluxe with mini humbuckers.

Left, a custom guitar by Daniel Burns; right, the '77 Fender Telecaster

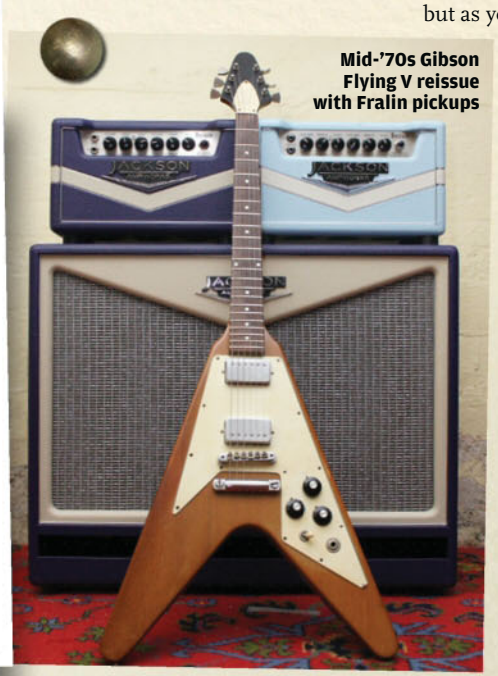
'I bought the Telecaster brand new in 1977. I used it on several world tours with Paul McCartney. It's my desert island electric'

'It had been scraped down to the wood by some guy in a punk band, but it's back to the original gold flake finish now as got my good friend Dave King, a fine UK luthier who builds beautiful acoustic guitars, to spray it back to the original colour. I was a little impatient and called him several times within days, and he just said he'd let me know as he was still stirring the paint! Apparently it takes an age to get all the metalflakes evenly mixed, but as you can see he ended up doing an impeccable job.

'I do find the mini humbuckers a little bright, so I just back off the tone a little. I do this when using just about all my electric guitars – I think you can drive amps better when the sound isn't too brittle. You can't do that on the bridge pickup of a standard Strat as obviously there isn't a bridge pickup tone control, and I think that's a problem for a lot of players who find that a Strat's bridge pickup can be a little thin.

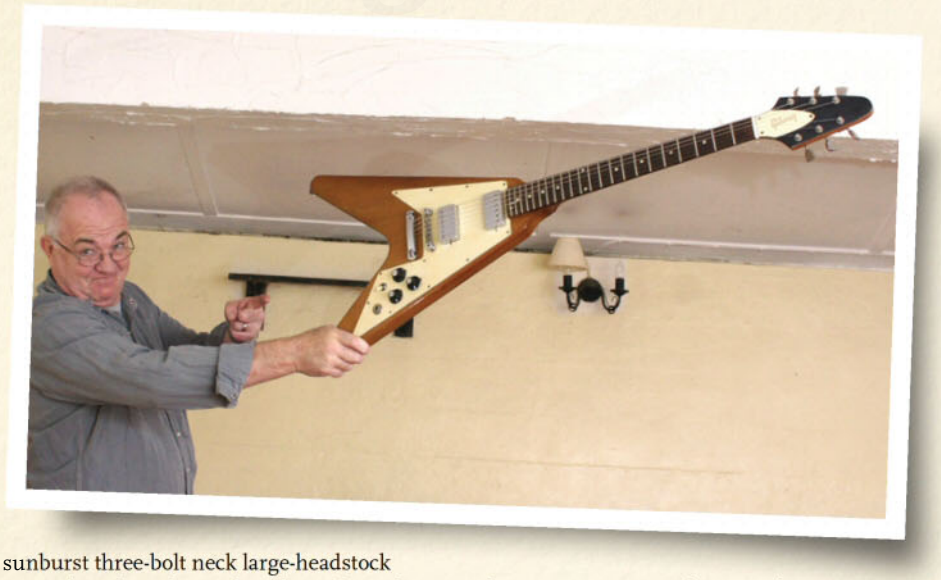
'One of the first decent guitars I ever owned was this Telecaster, bought brand new in 1977 with money lent to me by my grandfather, bless him. I did pay him back, and this one is close to my heart. I've it used it extensively ever since, including on several world tours with Paul McCartney... it was ideal for ↔

1976 maple-neck Strat with a filled Kahler rout and '72 reissue Strat



Mid-'70s Gibson Flying V reissue with Fralin pickups

'I've always loved Flying Vs. This one sounds really bluesy through the Fender Deluxe Reverb'



rhythm and lead work on songs like *All My Loving* and *Drive My Car*, where I had to play George Harrison's solos note for note. Having grown up listening to Beatles songs, actually learning them was fantastic. The Tele is the real deal; the trade-off is the hefty swamp ash body, but it's still my "desert island" electric... although I'd have to have electricity for an amp to hear it! I played an incredibly heavy swamp ash bass on a gig recently – I had a pain in my shoulder for days. I swear they both came from the same tree.

'I used the '77 Tele and my yellow Tele throughout my years with Chrissie Hynde and the Pretenders. Chrissie is a big Tele fan, and she's always been into an edgy vibe – bands like Mitch Rider And The Detroit Wheels, the Ramones, and ? And The Mysterians. There was a bit of a clash with my style which has got a bit more of the slightly refined harmonic sensibility of British pop, but overall it worked really well.

'The yellow Tele was built for me by Daniel Burns in West Virginia about 20 years ago. He used a Warmoth body and neck, Seymour Duncan pickups and Schaller hardware, and it's one of the first guitars I grab if I need a Tele-type sound.'

Touring in many countries has given Robbie the opportunity to acquire some cool classics. 'I did buy a lot which I don't have anymore – various Gibson 335s, early Strats and Teles, and a '53 Esquire which I sold to Malcolm Young. I did keep this 1976 sunburst three-bolt neck large-headstock Strat, though, and I used it a lot with Paul McCartney in the late '80s and '90s. That was a time when a lot of players were modifying Strats by fitting humbuckers, so I asked Roger Giffin to fit a hefty Kahler vibrato system. The Kahler worked really well but as the strings didn't go through the body it totally changed the sound of the guitar. You can see where it once was, but I've since replaced it with a more traditional unit.

'Around that same time I also bought this Japanese-built '72 reissue Strat finished in a sort of creamy vintage white colour. There's nothing special about it technically, but the sound and playability are really good. I've fitted Seymour Duncan Alnico 2 pickups at the middle and the neck; I didn't bother with the bridge as I rarely use that position, and the stock unit does sound nice.

'I also have black '62 reissue Strat with a rosewood fretboard which is in for a refret at the moment... it's a "does what it says on the tin" guitar. I used that one with Dire Straits and on a lot of Mark Knopfler's solo projects, mainly because it has a small headstock, which Mark likes. It's uncanny how some players see guitars in their mind's eye... I played on Talk Talk's *Colour Of Spring* album, and the singer Mark Hollis insisted I use my old Gibson 335 simply because it was red!'

Next up, Robbie walks in holding a Gibson Flying V... at arm's length, with ease. 'This one dates from 1975, and although it's made of mahogany it's incredibly light, as you can see,' he points out cheerfully. 'It's got Lindy Fralin humbuckers. I bought it in Portland, Oregon, which was great as you don't have to pay sales tax there.

'I've always loved Flying Vs, having listened to everyone from Albert King to Michael Schenker. I used this guitar for the lead work on the title track on the new album. It sounds really bluesy through the Fender Deluxe Reverb, and equally wonderful through these Jackson Ampworks heads and cabs, which are my main stage amps. They're built near Fort Worth in Texas. I have a pair of ported 2x12" cabs and two switchable heads, so I can select between 12, 15, 25 and 50W output.

'I also bought this '65 SG Junior in Portland. Anyone who has ever had one of these always comments on how good the ➔

1965 Gibson SG Junior with Badass bridge

Harmony-built Silvertone from the 1960s

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Single-pickup Silvertone 'amp in case' guitar

Three-pickup Jerry Jones Danelectro tribute

Oahu amp and lap steel, the latter made by Kay probably around 1939

dogear P90 can be, especially overdriven. This little brute fills so many slots, from slow blues to pure cleans and really dynamic overdriven slide. It's great.

'My little black Harmony Silvertone guitar was sold through the Sears Roebuck catalogue in the USA during the '60s. This is another guitar which works really well for slide – a lot of players like the gold and silver foil pickups. It's also on the new album, along with my Danelectro Silvertone "amp in case" guitar. I have a pair of these; one was given to me by Brad Whitford from Aerosmith. They're both from the early to mid-'60s.'

Vintage Danelectros aren't always the most dependable of guitars, despite their charms, and one option is – or used to be – a Jerry Jones replica, built in Nashville. 'My three-pickup Jerry Jones dates from 1992, and the wooden bridge gives it a quirky but cool sound with a touch of a sitar,' recommends Robbie. 'Like the Harmony and the Silvertone it sounds really good through a small overdriven amp, like my little Oahu. I'd searched for one of these amps for ages, eventually finding one as a set with matching lap steel. I use the amp on *This Time It's True*.'

Not all Robbie's guitars are over 50 years old. 'I hadn't really heard about German-built Duesenberg guitars until I worked with Robert Palmer's guitarist Carl Carlton,' he admits. 'Carl has his own signature model, and I have one here. It does have some of the essence of a big hollowbody Gretsch Country Gent, but it also has bags of its own personality, plus a centre block to act as a mantle for the pickups.

'I liked that one so much I thought I'd look at the smaller-bodied Duesenbergs. I now have two Double Cats, one in black, the other in fire-burst. They're built for the road, and they sound superb. I used them on tour with John Mayer from 2006 to 2010. The black Double Cat is fitted with a Duesenberg Multibender – it's a bit like a Palm Pedal from the '70s, but it's much more workable for me and far easier to set up. The humbucker and P90 combination found on a lot of these Double Cats is excellent.

'I did a lot of work with John at a show backstage in Kansas City. Ampeg had a guitar booth set up, and I took a liking to one of their Plexiglass guitars – this one here, in fact. I feel really privileged to own it,

'The Duesenberg Double Cats are built for the road. I love the humbucker/P90 combination'

Duesenberg Carl Carlton and a black Fire Cat with Multibender

Another Duesenberg Double Cat, this time with Deluxe Tremola

Ampeg reissue of a Dan Armstrong Plexiglas guitar

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1930s regal Angelus with added pickup.and two Fine Resophonic Company guitars

Robbie with his second koa-bodied Fine Resophonic

as Ampeg's Ted Kornblum said if I used it that night on the gig, I could have it – and I certainly didn't hesitate! It's such a cool guitar with the see-through look, and quite versatile with the replaceable pickup units.

'I have three workhorse wooden-bodied resonator guitars, which I also used with John Mayer. I personally like the warmth of a wooden-bodied reso, mainly because I haven't found a decent metal-bodied model yet... I'm on the lookout for one, though.

'This first one is an old Angelus made by Regal, who built resonators under license from Dobro using some Dobro parts. I bought this one from Charlie Chandler, but the headstock got badly damaged on a flight back from Australia so I had it repaired by Truetone Music in Santa Monica in LA. They also fitted a lipstick pickup which is blendable with an onboard Duncan/Turner D-Tar system. Technically, it's not that easy to accurately amplify resonators to the full effect; you can't successfully put a mic in the cone, so I find the best way is to have a pickup in the body and blend this with the natural sound of the cone via the D-Tar.

'I also have three really nice resonators built in Paris by the Fine Resophonic Company. The first one is an all-maple version with a biscuit bridge, a little like a classic wooden-bodied National Triolian from the '30s. I also have two koa models which are built more in the Dobro style, and these also with D-Tar systems with magnetic neck pickups and passive transducers. They're very well-built and record beautifully, and feature heavily throughout *Turn Up For The Books*.

'Acoustic guitars play a big part in my life, and every one I have does something quite distinct. Personally, mahogany-bodied guitars do it for me. To me, they sound lighter and a little more open from new; I think rosewood often takes a few more years to mature.

'Having said that, I do have some nice rosewood-bodied acoustics. This Collings D2HA dreadnought has an Adirondack spruce top; it's put together beautifully and sounds exquisite. This was a gift from John Mayer's band and crew for my 50th birthday, and they all signed the case, which was a really nice surprise. I also have a solidbody Collings 290, fitted with a pair of Lollar P90s. I bought this when I paid a visit to the factory; 290 is the number of the scenic highway that winds through the Texas Hill Country and passes the Collings shop. The dynamic range of this guitar is quite amazing.

'I also have a pair of nice Martins here, both with a personal story. I used the D-18 a lot with the Pretenders. It wasn't actually ↦

Collings 290 with Lollars and a D2HA dreadnought

Left, the Martin M3M which Robbie helped design; right, a Martin D-18, a gift from Chrissie Hynde

Details of the Martin M3M. This is the first-ever prototype

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Classic Guild 12-string and a Guild F46

1957 Gibson J-50 with LR Baggs M1 pickup and mid-'20s Gibson A Jr mandolin

mine at the time. I commented once to Chrissie Hynde in the studio how nice it was, and jokingly asked if I could have it. I didn't think any more of it until I decided to leave the band, and she just said "It's yours!" It's 43 years old now, so it's well matured. It's fitted with a Mimesis soundhole pickup, which was the prototype of the Fishman Rare Earth, designed by Bill Puplett and Mike Vanden. Unlike the modern Rare Earth which runs on 9 volts, this is powered by just 3 volts, and to my ears it has a much better sound. Recording and sound engineers love the balance of this one.'

The next Martin is something special. 'The Martin Guitar Company wanted to make a special limited edition signature model for Beatles producer George Martin, and so they asked him want he wanted when it came to wood choice and the looks and so on, but he admitted to them that he didn't know enough about guitars to contribute many ideas.

'I had been working and hanging out with his son Giles, and Giles asked me what I would like to see when it came to the design. As it turned out they took all my ideas onboard and came up with the George Martin M3M George Martin Studio Edition, which turned out to be a very exclusive Martin model. It comes complete with all the trimmings including an Italian alpine spruce top, an ebony fretboard and a larger 0000-shaped mahogany body.

'George himself was given one of the four main prototypes, complete with his signature on the label inside and inlaid with his name at the 20th fret, plus a number "5" at the fifth fret, which pertains to George Martin being known as the fifth Beatle. But when he was presented with the number one model, the prototype, he said he would like to give it to me as I helped design it, which I thought was a lovely gesture... and here it is. It's now 10 years old and maturing beautifully.

'I always wanted a decent, big-bodied 12-string and was lucky enough to get hold of a jumbo Guild 12-string for a really good price. It's the model linked to Pete Townshend and the one I think Jimmy Page used for *Stairway To Heaven,* and it's a perfect partner to this six-string Guild F46, designed by George Gruhn. I wrote and recorded practically all of *UnSung* with this one.'

So which is Robbie's most-loved acoustic guitar? None of the Guilds, nor even any of the Martins; that honour goes to a simple old Gibson. 'The one I probably like the most out of all of them is my '57 J-50, which I bought out in Nashville,' he reveals. 'It's very same model that James Taylor, one of my all-time heroes, often used.

'For me it's the ultimate example of all the anecdotal phrases generally used to describe an exceptional guitar... classic, vintage, played in, matured, loud, sweet, dynamic, resonant, short scale, and so on. It's just superb in every department, and it's such a friendly guitar to play. I use this one on all my pub gigs – I see no point in leaving it at home.

'I seem to be able to play any style on this one... it's great for just about anything. I have fairly strong fingers so I can even coax big bendy blues licks out of it in the style of Albert King, even with a set of 12 gauge strings. This one can be heard on a lot of my own albums, from *Wide Screen* to *Emotional Bends* and *Unsung* and the new *Turn Up For The Books.* It's such an inspirational songwriting guitar to have around.

'Next to the J-50 is something I bring out for playing folk nights, a little Gibson A Jr mandolin dating back to 1925. I actually took this out on tour with Norah Jones, as it's perfect to add the odd little touches to live and studio recordings.'

'The Gibson J-50 is such a friendly guitar to play. I use it for all my pub gigs. I don't see the point in leaving it at home'

Next, Robbie produces more evidence of the talent of the UK's Dave King. 'This is one of his parlour guitars, called a Louise,' he explains. 'It's only a few years old, and it's very well built with Engelmann spruce for the soundboard, Brazilian rosewood for the fingerboard and rosewood for the body. This guitar has really sweet tone and a long throw.

'I also have a "car boot sale" guitar, a Maurer concert-style 541 acoustic. According to *Tom Wheeler's Guitar Book* these are quite rare and were built by the famous Larson brothers in the '40s. It was painted red when I first saw it, but there was something about it. After sanding it back and fixing it up it's become a nice player, especially for slide.

'My only nylon-strung guitar takes me back to my classical days: it's an Aria, built by an American luthier working for the company in the mid-'80s. It's handy to have, although I might have to a fair bit of rehearsing if I get the call to do a classical gig!'

Robbie is currently working on new material in preparation to go out with the Robbie McIntosh band in 2014. 'There'll probably be some family members involved, as all my sons and daughter are musicians,' he laughs. 'Maybe I'll find time to check out some more guitars on tour! A nice Gibson L-5 would ideal, along with a decent vintage metal-bodied National resonator...'

For more information on Robbie McIntosh visit www.robbiemcintosh.com

Left to right: 1980s Aria classical, 1940s Maurer and a Dave King Louise parlour

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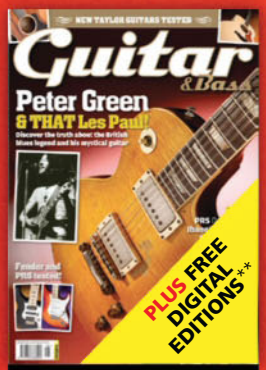

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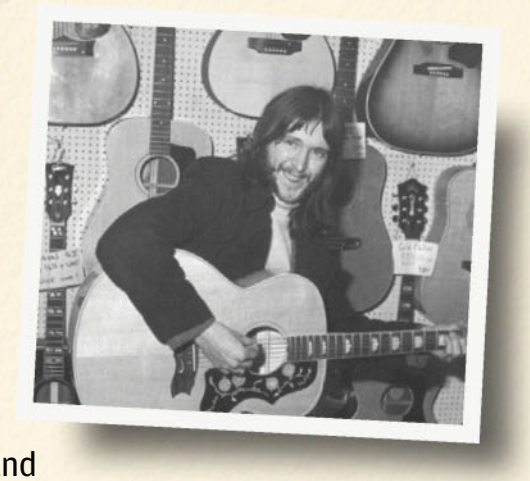

It's a pick and mix this month as **Sid Bishop** looks at oddball and alternative collectables, plus Gretsches and that blue-chip star of the vintage electric guitar world, the sunburst Les Paul Standard

This month I'm going to kick off with a 'pot-pourri ' of guitars that you might not even perceived as being collectable at all, then take a look at Gibson's iconic Les Paul, and round off with a peek at Gretsch guitars... something hopefully to interest everybody.

Few of us will have the wherewithal to build up one of those collections of vintage American guitars that we all enviously drool at, myself included. Here's some news: you might not have to. There's all kinds of other stuff you can surround yourself with, still immensely satisfying, and a whole lot cheaper. I have eight guitars at the present time, all of which I play regularly, and none of them cost much. I have a Mexican Fender Esquire, two Squier Stratocasters, an Ibanez RG370DX, a Layke semi, an Epiphone '63 SG Standard (sympathetically modified), and a couple of oddballs which I put together myself out of commercially available parts. The whole lot could be replaced for about £2000 but they do the job and make me happy.

I regularly read, with great interest, the *Private Collection* features in this very magazine. A lot of those guys have gathered together some pretty weird stuff, and to be honest it's often stuff I wouldn't give house room. However, if it makes them happy, then that's fair enough. I've seen some collections that feature often derided early Japanese guitars, Teiscos, Grecos, Teradas, Guyatones, Ibanez's and the like, and yet others that favour Watkins Rapiers, Vox Teardrops, Rosetti Airstreams, Hoyers, Egmonds, Futuramas, Hagstroms, Shergolds, Haymans, Burns, or even certain more 'affordable' American guitars such as Harmony, Danelectro or Coral – all playable with a little work, historically interesting, no doubt with a big dollop of nostalgia, and they also get preserved for future generations. Few are 'collectable' from an investment viewpoint, because they're not worth significant money, nor are they ever likely to be, but my focus here is on collecting what you like.

You can come up with several excuses for building a guitar collection. Firstly, solely for investment; buy them cheap now and sell them on in the future when the prices have all gone up. Okay, it's logical reasoning, and I wish I'd thought of doing that 40 or 50 years ago. The second excuse, and one with a more practical foundation, is because you do a wide variety of gigs or session work, and you need a sizeable armoury of guitars to cover everything that you're ever likely to be called upon to do. Thirdly, you just really, really like guitars, can hang them all on the spare bedroom wall and just sit there looking at them, breathing in the nostalgia and reminding yourself of your glory days, or else what might have been. The final reason is because you suffer from a mental illness. This usually manifests itself when a sufferer enters any reasonably-stocked guitar shop and immediately goes 'Oooh, I must have that!' It is generally known as Guitar Acquisition Syndrome. I suffer from this illness. There should be regular meetings.

How about old Hofners? Consistently ignored in past years, they are now becoming desirable. Prices are steadily creeping up, and I've recently seen a couple of '60s Hofner Galaxies priced way more than their intrinsic values (in my judgement). The worth of such

1964 Burns Bison, a 1959 Futurama and a 1961 Hofner Verithin

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Three fine Les Pauls: a 1959 Standard, a 1954 Custom with Alnico and P90 pickups, plus a 1954 goldtop with a pair of P90s and wrapover bridge

I know of one collector with 35 pristine Les Paul sunbursts and another with 150. That's around 10 per cent of all the '58-'60 Standards ever made

items is bound to be subjective, despite what I might think, and I'm sure that nostalgia plays a major part. At the end of the day, any guitar is only worth what somebody is actually willing to pay for it. A bit of sniffing around should still unearth some reasonably priced old Hofners, but hurry! Several '60s models have been reissued over the past couple of years, and the latest range includes updated versions of the Galaxie, the Colorama, the Club, the Verythin, plus the legendary Violin bass. There are also some fine archtops resurrecting the old Committee, Congress and Senator models, original examples of which can in fact fetch substantial sums, most of which I suspect get snapped up by guys performing a Billy Fury or Tommy Steele tribute act on the cruise ship circuit.

By the way, don't neglect old amps either. Not too many around now, as when they blew up in the old days or were in some other way beyond practical repair they were simply thrown out. Old Watkins, Burns Orbits, Selmers, Jennings, Impacts, Kellys and many others have virtually disappeared. Well, when did you last see one? I have a good friend who uses an old Wem 'V-front' Dominator as a studio amp and it sounds brilliant. Collecting is always great fun, and hunting down all this old stuff often provides its own reward.

Now on to a subject that many of you have been eagerly awaiting, the Gibson Les Paul. This iconic and much-copied guitar first appeared in 1952. It still sells in thousands annually, and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Guitar players are a conservative bunch, even the young 'uns it seems, and rarely stray very far from the handful of familiar classic favourites, including the Les Paul, all of which have been around for 50 or 60 years.

Early run Les Paul Standards had P90s but were then gifted with humbuckers in 1957 (just as a goldtop), and both styles have been continually reissued since. Customs from this era are safe buys, particularly the original mid-'50s Custom Black Beauty model which featured the square-pole Alnico rhythm pickup and the bridge soapbar P90. From '57 onwards Customs had two, or three humbuckers, and there are a few very rare examples with just one. The triple pickup Custom with Switchmaster wiring is especially scarce (I've only ever seen two). Les Paul Specials had two P90s, but there was also the single pickup Junior, plus a three-quarter scale version. Other variations have been the blinged-up Artisan, the 25/50, the stripped down The Paul and Firebrand models, the Professional, Personal and Recording models (plus a matching Triumph bass) that featured low-impedance pickups, the popular DeLuxe and Pro DeLuxe, a steadily growing quantity of artist tribute editions, and a handful of others whose lifespan was fairly short. Gibson's finish options have included a wide variety of different sunbursts, wine red, natural, black, gold, white, that horrible silverburst, TV yellow (on the Specials and Juniors), pelham blue, Inverness green, a run of Nascar-themed Standards, a batch made of wood rescued from the hurricane Katrina debris, a run of DeLuxes in Red Sparkle or Blue Sparkle, and the Zoot Suit. If collecting for long term profit however, steer clear of the quirky models.

So which Les Pauls are most collectable? Well, most of the above, and as you might expect, the older the better from an investment point of view. Newer examples may increase in value over time and will enjoy their own turn at being 'vintage', but none of them will ever achieve the stratospheric heights of the holy grail of any guitar collector, the 1958-1960 run of sunburst Standards. Market prices fluctuate, naturally, but just five or six years ago a particularly clean sunburst could readily fetch a quarter of a million dollars in the US. As I write this in the current economic climate, prices have dropped dramatically, and $150,000 to $175,000 would now be more realistic, equating to around £100,000 in the UK, quite likely significantly less (all very dependent upon condition), though still beyond the reach of most of you reading this. Still, a damn good return if you bought one in 1970 for £400, and I know a few people who did. A guitar which can be proved beyond doubt to have been owned by a legendary player will fetch many times more, the recent sale of the ex Peter Green/Gary Moore guitar being just one example, but at that point it ceases to be a mere guitar and instead becomes a piece of rock memorabilia – and that's a somewhat different market.

I am aware of two American collectors, one of whom has managed to build up a collection of 35 pristine examples. The other has amassed a staggering collection of 150 original sunbursts, so these two collectors between them own around 10 per cent of all '58-'60 sunbursts ever made. We can only boggle at their monetary value. It's just a real shame that nobody ever gets to see them.

Getting back to the real world, in my view a good buy at the present time would be the reissue series of Les Paul Customs and DeLuxes first appearing in 1968, with the Standards following on a little later. Plentiful, and still reasonably priced being not truly 'vintage' just yet, there's a chance that they will progressively increase in value. I saw a '68 goldtop DeLuxe just a month or so ago priced at £2250, and a '74 red sparkle example at £1875, both very sensible ↦

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L-R: a 1957 Gretsch Country Gentleman, a 1955 6120 Chet Atkins, and a George Harrison-style '57 Duo Jet

Gretsch guitars are forever associated with Bo Diddley, Chet Atkins, Duane Eddy, George Harrison, Eddie Cochran and other giants

purchases. Or if you have the spare cash and can afford to stash them away untouched for years, then buy new ones. They'll likely be a very easy sell in 40 years time, and a whole lot more entertaining than just leaving your money festering in the bank.

On a final 'sunburst' related note, keep in mind that there are hundreds and hundreds of forgeries around, some of which are very convincing indeed... in fact I would hazard a guess that there are more fakes in existence than real ones. As almost all originals are now accounted for, if you are ever offered a sunburst, new to the market, the odds are that it will be a forgery. Your watchwords must be 'history' and 'provenance' so beware.

Now let's take a look at the Gretsch marque. They're lovely guitars, very '60s, and forever associated with the likes of Bo Diddley, Chet Atkins, Duane Eddy, George Harrison, Eddie Cochran, Stephen Stills, David Crosby, the Monkees, and many other giants of the musical landscape of the '50s and '60s.

Here's some history. The Gretsch company was founded in 1883 by the eponymous family of German immigrants, originally making just banjos and drums. Guitars began to be produced in the 1930s, and their first electrics appearing in 1939. The company has endured a patchy history, going bankrupt twice, and suffering a disastrous factory fire. The first financial collapse resulted in Gretsch being sold to Baldwin in 1967. Continuing to lurch from crisis to crisis, they finally closed the factory doors in 1981. Despite this litany of misfortune, Gretsch family descendants maintained control of the brand, and production moved to the Far East. They were eventually purchased by Fender in 2002, although still with a member of the Gretsch family firmly at the helm. Today's guitars are made in China or Japan, with a limited quantity of handmade 'custom shop' models being produced in the USA.

From a collecting point of view we are looking primarily at guitars made between the mid-'50s and around 1980 if we are collecting with long-term value in mind, but buy the newer Far Eastern models if you prefer to collect what you like, or can afford. They do play very well, and look great.

Gretsch are frequently pigeonholed as being just a country pickers guitar, especially as many of their most popular models bore the signature of country guitar wizard Chet Atkins. As his popularity, and that of the other artists named earlier, ebbed and flowed with musical fashion, so too would the demand for the guitars they played, and therein lay Gretsch's problem. Their target market was just too narrow by the 1970s, many players from that generation not even knowing or caring who Chet Atkins was, and thus they never enjoyed the all-conquering market dominance of Gibson and Fender. Even Chet himself switched his allegiance to Gibson in the early '70s. The jaw-dropping talents of Gretsch devotee Brian Setzer did a great deal to make the brand more visible for a while, but it was too little too late.

Gretsch has made a wide range of solids and chambered semi-solids over many years, such as the Corvette, Firebird, Duo Jet, Silver Jet, and the ultra-rare Penguin and Roundup models, but arguably their most iconic guitars, and hence now most sought after, have been the semi-acoustics, the Anniversary (both Single and Double versions) the, Tennessean, Country Gentleman, Country Club, Viking, White Falcon, and the orange 6120 model used by Eddie Cochran. There were also entry-level Clipper and Rally models, and for many years the top-of-the-range White Falcon was touted as being the most expensive electric guitar ever made.

Gretsch very much had their own take on how to build guitars, and some bizarre features will be found on certain models such as painted-on f-holes, string dampers operated by a little lever, a floating bridge suspended over a hole in the body, or big pads on the backs held on by poppers, some of which covered inspection plates which could be removed to gain access to the internal wiring. Some fairly unconventional colours were also offered, in addition to more familiar blacks and sunbursts.

The Firebirds and Duo Jets bore an obvious resemblance to Gibson's Les Paul, but the bodies were chambered to save weight (there are now Les Pauls on sale that do precisely the same thing, although some 50 years later). The Corvettes evidently took their cue from the Gibson SG. The Anniversary was a lot like a Gibson ES-175, and the Country Club looked a bit like a Byrdland. Other models had something of the ES-335 about them, so Gretsch weren't actually straying too far from well-established designs. Don't ignore their acoustics, either; over the years they have produced many archtop jazz-style instruments, all pretty rare these days, and western style flat-tops, most notably the recently reissued Rancher with its unique triangular soundhole.

To sum up this all too brief overview of Gretsch, they are truly great guitars with plenty of character, and they aren't just for country pickers. As they aren't especially numerous, there's a chance that their strong cult status will help them continue to command a good degree of desirability... and perhaps nothing looks as good on any spare bedroom wall as a fine row of Gretsches.

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Electric Learning Land

Your guitar doesn't work. But what's wrong – the jack, the pots, the switch, the pickups, or something else? Before you pack your guitar away to visit the professionals, read our basic guide to troubleshooting electric guitar wiring

The most important aspect of successful electrical repair work is an efficient diagnostic approach that enables you to find out exactly why a circuit is malfunctioning. Diagnosing electrical problems is a tricky process combining a little hardcore knowledge with intuitive judgement and a disciplined process of elimination; of course, accumulating knowledge sharpens up your intuitive judgement and reduces the time spent eliminating possible problem areas.

Before attempting guitar electro-surgery, however, it's necessary to understand a few basic principles. The most important principle is that electricity – or, more to the point, electrons – flow in circles; if a circle is broken, the electrons can't flow and the circuit won't work.

The wiring system within a guitar is made up of many circles, most of which are straightforward and easy enough to spot and check. Troubleshooting electrical problems always begins with 'check the circles' testing because just one broken circle somewhere in the circuit can silence the entire system; find it, repair it and the job's pretty much done.

Spot the circle

Let's consider a single-coil Strat-type pickup connected to a volume control, a tone control and then an output socket (see Fig 1 on the opposite page). The pickup circle starts at the top of the pickup coil at the 'live' or 'hot' lead or wire, which then connects to the top tag of the volume pot; this lead carries the all-important output from the pickup. The bottom tag of the volume control is then connected to the bottom connection of the pickup coil to complete the circle; this lead is called the earth or, to use its full name, the earth return. In action, the electrons flow out from the pickup's live lead, down through the volume pot's resistive track and back to the pickup again via the earth return. In the diagram you can see that the bottom of both the pickup coil and the volume pot are also connected to the body or casing of the volume pot, which becomes the main earth connection for the circuit.

This is an example of what we call a primary circle. It's primary because the resistive track in the volume pot is wired across the pickup at all times. Fig 1 also shows another primary circle, the one used around the tone control; again, notice that the circle is never broken.

Another type of circle, a secondary circle, is used to pick the output off the middle or 'wiper' tag of the volume control and send both it and the earth connection via the guitar lead to the amplifier, where the circle is completed. Secondary circles are interesting because they are not true circles until something makes them so – the position of a

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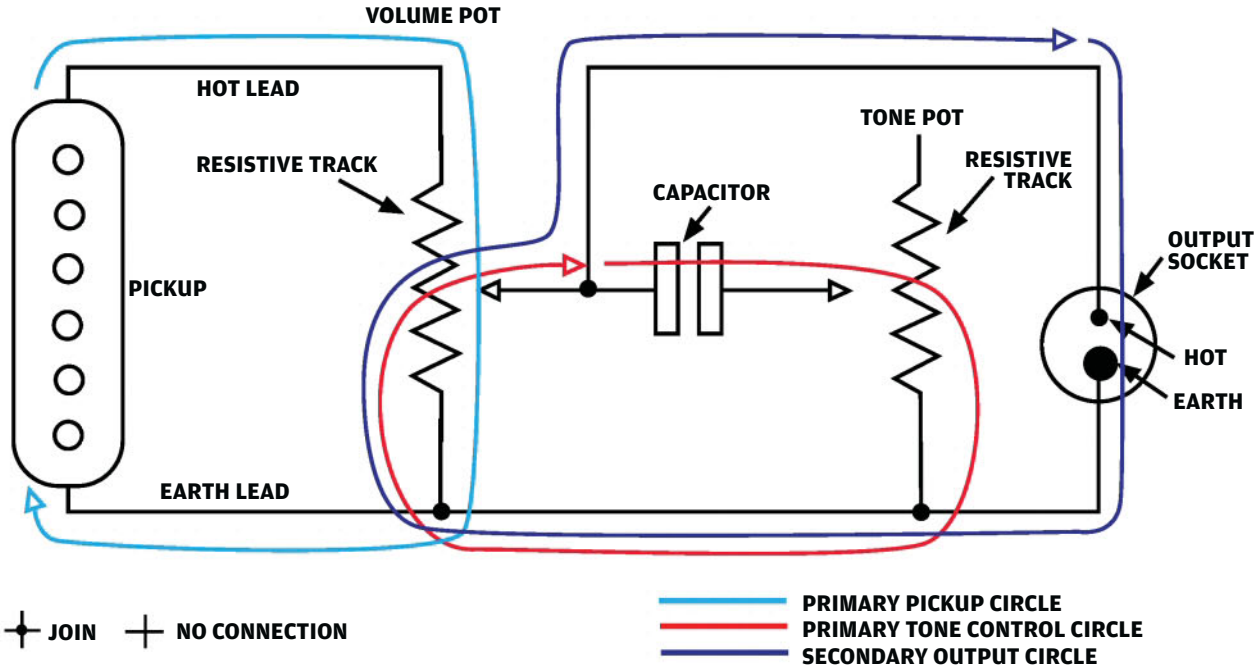
FIG 1



Primary and secondary circles both rely on a good earth circuit. They're prone to breakdown, and for the same reason – poor conductivity

switch, for example, or ultimately the guitar amplifier itself.

Conductivity

Primary and secondary circles may be different, yet both rely on a good earth return in order to work. It's because of this that they are prone to breakdown, and for the same reason – poor conductivity.

In primary circles, high resistance solder connections (aka 'dry joints') introduce this poor conductivity into a circuit, and nine times out 10 they can be cured by a simple jab from a hot soldering iron. Resoldering a dodgy dry solder joint restores its electrical resistance to the electron flow to nearly zero ohms and, more importantly, fixes it at that point; the joint then presents the same near zero resistance each time it is used, and so becomes reliable.

Secondary circles can also suffer from dry joint syndrome, but they're more likely to be troubled by 'dry contact' syndrome – a condition where the contacts within a switch, a pot or an output socket become tarnished. At its worst the tarnish is actually a thin film of very high resistance oxidation which prevents the electrons getting through. It's possible to clean contacts to remove the oxidation, but as oxidation eats into the surface of the contacts and takes away any hope of true reliability, the best cure is often to bin the offending part and go for replacement. At best, however, the electrons are halted by a thin film of crud shed by you, the player. This can usually be removed with appropriate spray cleaners, but be warned: crud is an acidic sweat-based compound, very partial to electrical contacts!

Spot the difference

Components suffering from heavy crud build-up will work properly most of the time, but every now and then they'll need to be hit extra hard or given a vicious waggle to make them operate; conversely, components suffering from oxidation become very sensitive and usually only work if they are left untouched by the player. Both problems are very common and relatively easy to spot.

Hunting the fault

Freshly armed with your understanding of circles and dodgy joints you are now ready to troubleshoot just about any guitar. First, plug the offending instrument, with its volume and tone controls turned up full, into an amplifier. Select the neck pickup position on the selector switch, and hit the strings. If you hear nothing from the amp, flip the switch to the bridge pickup and hit the strings again. If you still hear nothing, jiggle the lead in the output socket and listen for a crackling 'make-or-break' noise from the amp. If you hear a sudden rush of sound, then you've found your major problem – the jack socket contacts and/or its solder connections are breaking the output's secondary circle. Equally, you may find that the output socket works fine and jiggling the pickup selector switch restores the sound. Whichever way, the nature of the problem is the same: poor solder connections on the component and/or tarnished contacts within it are interrupting or breaking the circuit circle.

Volume and tone controls can also silence an otherwise functioning primary circuit circle if a resistive track on a pot has become so filthy that the wiper is unable to pick up the signal. Spotting this problem is simplicity itself: if the amp is filled with gritty sandpaper-type noises as you turn the pot back and forth,that's the tell-tale sign that the track and wiper are dirty and need to be cleaned or the part replaced.

The diagnostic nature of electrical repairs has a real Sherlock Holmes feel and it can be a very satisfying process, particularly if you're successful!

External examination

Next, armed with a pencil, let's troubleshoot a Strat with a noisy pickup selector switch. Start with the same test procedure as outlined before: plug the instrument into an amp via a lead and turn all the guitar controls up full. Waggle the switch back and forth and listen to the noises from the amplifier. A switch that is working properly will create a mild 'click' from the speaker as it moves between the settings (this level of switch noise is acceptable, as the switch is making and breaking the signal path). A switch with worn or dirty contacts will sound and feel altogether different – moving it between the settings makes the amp crackle and roar, and the switch may feel stiff and difficult to move.

We already knew the Strat had a dodgy switch, so before removing the scratchplate

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to fix it, check if there is anything else at all wrong with the guitar. Start with the pickups, and be sure to note the results of your tests on paper as you go along.

Testing the pickups

Select the neck pickup and turn the amplifier up a little. Next, hold a small steel screwdriver by its blade and touch it onto each pole of that pickup (you may want to lay the guitar down flat). The screwdriver will be drawn by the magnetism and should make a solid 'clunk' sound from the speaker as it makes contact with the pole. If that is all you hear, then the pole has passed the test.

Before moving on to clunk-test the next pole, make sure that the screwdriver is NOT being earthed out by touching a string. With the screwdriver correctly in place on the pole touch the blade and listen out for a loud hum from the amp. If the speaker still remains silent then the pole is functioning correctly, if it hums crazily then you have discovered a fault which could be within the pickup, its wiring connections or both, and this fault could also be contributing to the noisy switch. Move the selector switch to the middle pickup and test its poles in the same way, and finish up by clunk-testing the bridge pickup.

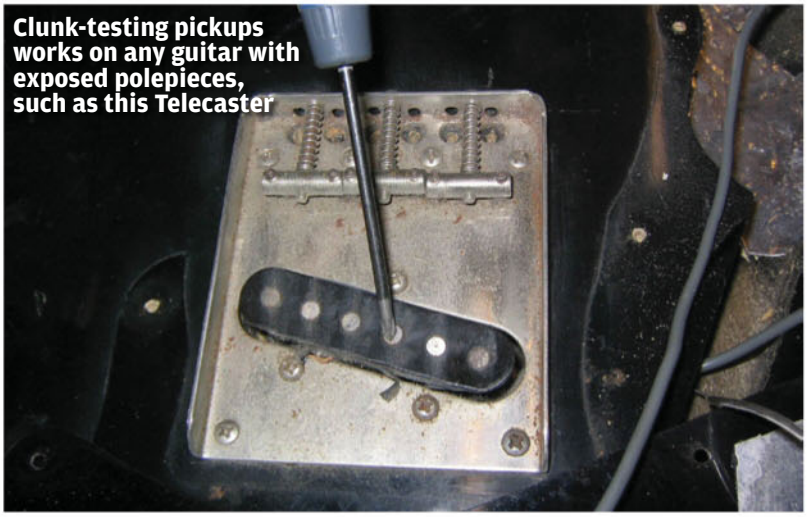
Next, hit the strings and turn the volume pot down and up to check that it works properly without adding any crackles to the sound. Copy the test with the two tone controls (just remember to select the correct pickups before you check the pots). When checking tone controls, also listen out for how the tone changes as you turn the pot up and down. If it behaves more like a volume control than a tone control then there is fault either with the pot, its capacitor, the wiring around the component, or all three.

The verdict

We've carried out our external examination of the troublesome Strat. What do we know? Well, the selector switch has had it, the pickups seem okay, but the first tone control (the one for the neck pickup) is noisy and doesn't sound quite right. Of course, you would have jotted all this down on your checklist. So now it's either time for some DIY or if you don't feel happy about that, a trip to your repair person.

Under the hood

If you're going DIY, the first step is to access the offending controls. Slacken and remove the strings and with a small cross-head screwdriver remove the scratchplate screws; place them on a tin lid or similar for safe keeping. Pull the scratchplate upwards and out from the body and turn it over to see underneath. Watch out for the output socket leads and the bridge earth wire, which will still be attached to the guitar body.



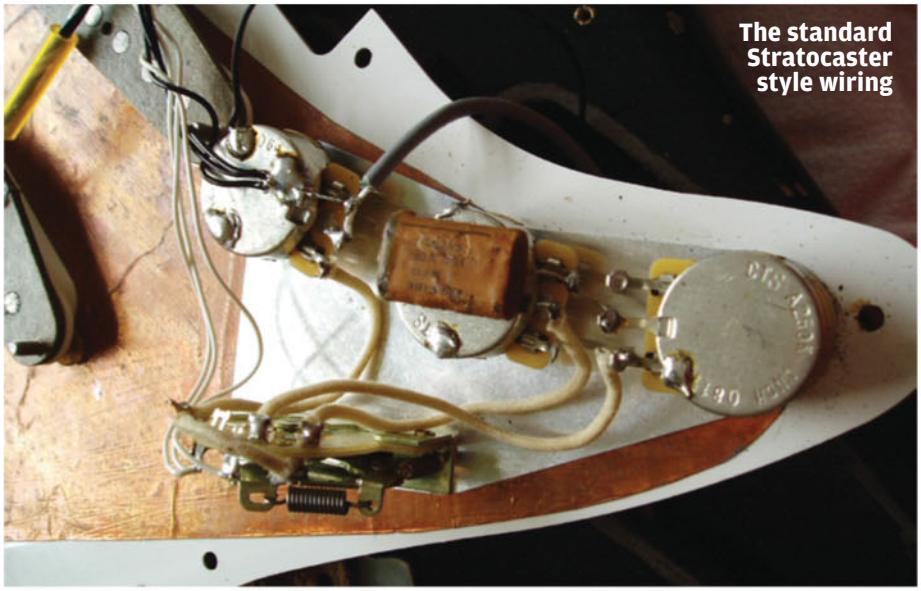
Clunk-testing pickups works on any guitar with exposed polepieces, such as this Telecaster

The screwdriver will make a 'clunk' from the speaker as it makes contact with the pole. If that's all you hear, the pole has passed the test

The photo below shows a typical Strat scratchplate; you can see how the three pickup 'live' leads go straight to their respective terminals on the switch, whereas the three pickup earth leads, and the bridge earth lead, are soldered together onto the back of the volume pot. This all-together-in-one-place earthing technique is a very reliable way to make a main earth return point for both the audio signal and the earth plane screening within the guitar. Some Strats also hardwire the casing of both tone pots and the chassis of the five-way switch to the casing of the volume pot, a technique which ensures that all the exposed metal parts of these components are properly earthed.

Unfortunately, older Strats and many copies omit these additional earth wires and instead provide the metal parts with an earth connection via a metal foil screen stuck to the rear of the scratchplate. The electrical connection is made by squashing the foil onto the underside of the pot when the fixing nut is tightened. The squashed foil approach is all well and good when the instrument is new and clean but, unfortunately, oxidation and dirt can build up between the foil and the pots which increases the electrical resistance of their connection and upsets the earth return for the tone controls.

Back to our theoretical patient. The switch? It's possible that cleaning might quieten it, but the best solution is to bin it and replace it with a new one. Dirt and crud has also built up between the foil and the first tone control, which is fortunately cleanable and so repairable. If this were a real guitar I would hard-wire the tone controls and the switch to the casing of the volume pot and thereby avoid this particular problem happening again.



The standard Stratocaster style wiring

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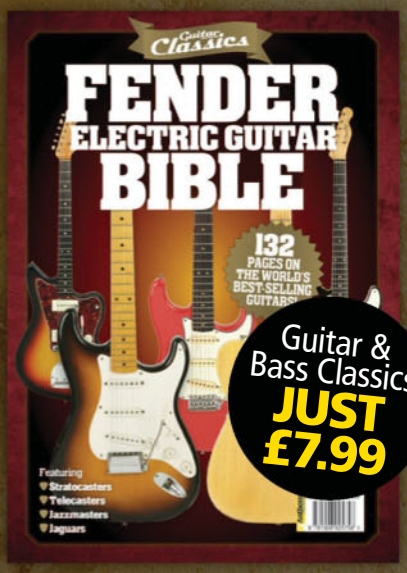

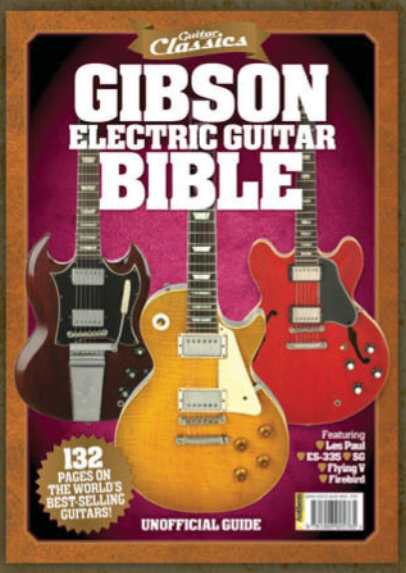

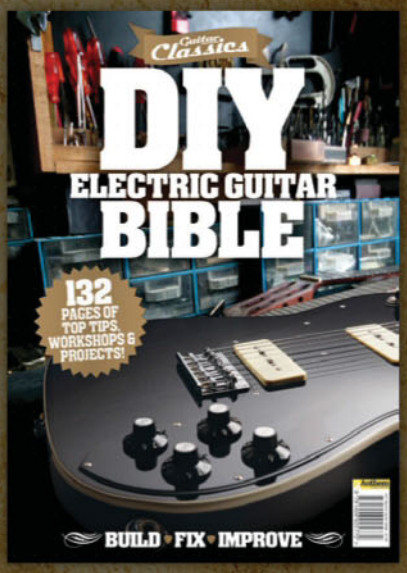

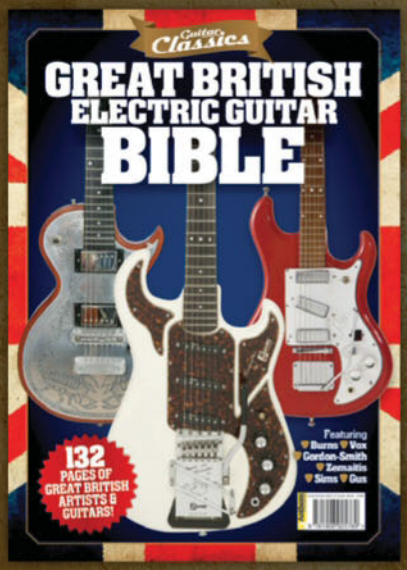

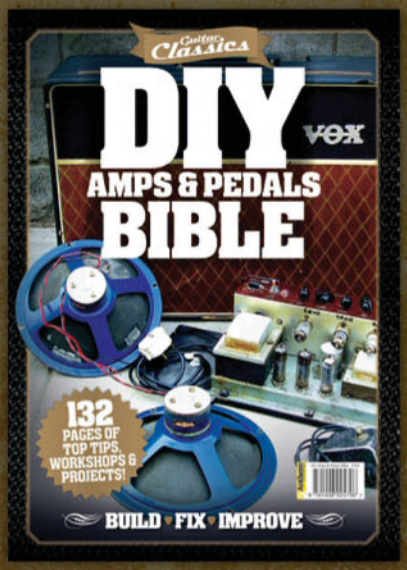

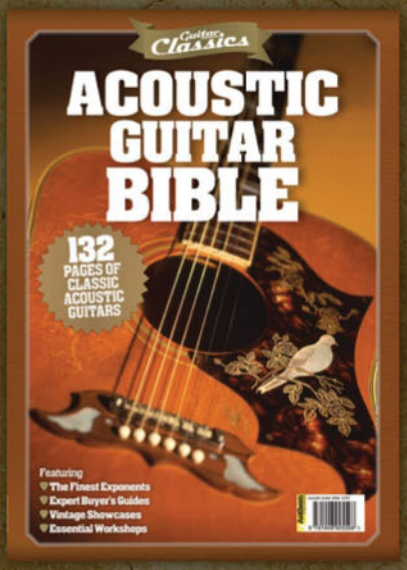

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Tools Of The Trade

Don't know your cross-head from your multi-core? Scan your beadies over these pages for a comprehensive outline of the basic tools required to work on electric guitars and basses

You don't need a workshop bulging with gear to repair electric guitars – all it takes to get started is a handful of tools costing as little as about £35, and a clear table top (plus, of course, access to a mains socket to power a small desk light and a soldering iron). Fortunately, most of the tools used to repair electric guitars are the same as those you would use for regular domestic electrical work, and are readily available from DIY stores at reasonable prices. Here's a typical list of tools required for electro-surgery...

Screwdrivers

Medium-size Philips cross-head – for scratchplate and cavity plate screws, switch screws and pickup screws, and so on. Medium-size flat-blade – for most control knob fixing screws, plus Gibson humbucker-type height adjuster screws.

Pliers

Small to medium sized wire cutters (also called electrician's cutters).

Medium-sharp knife

A small kitchen knife with a three-inch blade – the size you might choose to cut small vegetables – is my favourite. The blade isn't as sharp as a scalpel, but this reduces the chances of cutting both the insulation and the multi-core wire when you strip the end of a wire in preparation for tinning. This can be tricky on both screened and unscreened wire.

Small table-mounted vice

A 3" to 4" bench-mount type is best. Maplin and B&Q have many suitable small vices on offer; some are fixed to the table by a single screw clamp, while some are held by a devilishly cunning sucker mechanism. A great first-time vice is available from Maplin; they call it a Hobby Vice (fnar, fnar), and it costs around £15. The vice is designed to be vacuum-mounted, and is man enough for most jobs. Their Table Vice, however, is a much better bet, and it costs about the same. This vice mechanism is well-made with a very cunning 'fit any situation' table-mounting system – great for guitar techs.

Desk light

Any domestic Anglepoise-type light will do.

Box spanners

You will need a set of three double-ended box spanners which have different-sized spanners at each end: 12 and 13mm, 10 and 11mm, and a 2 and 4BA.

Box spanners are a really useful tools as they allow you to slacken and tighten nuts on a guitar without endangering the finish or the scratchplate. The three sizes quoted cover the volume and tone control nuts, the larger output socket, and the mighty fiddly miniature toggle-switch fixing nut. The output socket nut on guitars that use a recessed output socket, such as a Strat or Telecaster, can only be tightened successfully with a box spanner, so this size is a must. As tools go they are very cheap, so treat yourself to a set.

Soldering iron

You will need two soldering irons, a 15W to 25W pencil-type, and a whopping great 100W soldering gun. The pencil iron is used mostly for soldering the wires that carry the signal of the pickups; these connections are quite small and so relatively easy to solder quickly and successfully. My favourite iron is an

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You'll need two soldering irons – a 15-25W pencil-type for small wires and a whopping great 100W gun for unsoldering earth connections

Antex 15W pencil type which is light, heats up rapidly and doesn't eat its bit or tip too quickly. It'll cost around £20 from Maplin.

The solder gun is used to unsolder earth connections to the metal casing of volume and tone controls. These are much harder to work on than signal connections because the metal casings are substantial enough to draw the heat away from a small iron and so prevent the solder from melting.

This 'earth the casing' technique is important because it provides both a reliable and an effective method of distributing the earth return within the guitar and also valuable EMR hum and buzz screening. Unfortunately, the connections to the casing are impossible to unsolder with a low-wattage soldering iron; this is a job best left to a solder gun which heats up rapidly when you pull and hold the trigger. Do that and it's ready to pour serious wattage into the solder connection – then the gun happily turns itself off and the tip cools down when the trigger is released. My own gun is produced by Weller, it has proven itself to be a reliable and effective bit of kit and comes highly recommended. Most regular DIY stores will sell this gun or one very like it from around £30.

For the one-stop shopper some online outfits offer complete soldering kits, which can come complete with a 100W gun, a 30W pencil iron, a miniature workpiece holder and a bundle of spare bits and some solder, all in a durable plastic case. At the moment you can buy the Draper kit on eBay from £27.

Multi-core solder

Medium weight 'multi-core' solder is suitable for both signal and earth connections. Buy small amounts to begin with, and rolls when you've got the hang of it. Down the centre of this solder run four or more lines of flux which travel the length of the solder, in Brighton rock lettering style. The flux is a nasty concoction of chemicals which eat into the surface of the metals to be soldered – an important brew, as it cleans the metal surfaces and aids the transfer of heat from the gun, but it stinks when it melts so remember not to have your head over the iron looking down onto the work when the little puff of smoke comes up! This position guarantees a lung full of unpleasantness which is probably very unhealthy, so keep your nose to one side and away from the whiff.

Soldering: the rules

Electrical soldering is an easy skill to master if you follow the right procedures. It's all about preparation, an organised worksurface, and good technique. In fact, if you need the four golden rules of soldering, here they are...

1) All contacts to be soldered together must be clean of tarnish and oxidation, made tidy and correctly 'tinned'.

2) Contacts to be soldered together must be placed together and heated up by the iron sufficiently to melt the solder tinning before any further solder is applied to them.

3) The new joint must remain completely still whilst the solder cools.

4) Only use multi-core solder.

The first three rules require a little practise to perfect.

Cleaning duties

Cleaning the contacts before soldering is important because it ensures that the solder takes quickly to the new joint. Speed is of the essence here as it saves the rest of the component from excessive heat stress, an important consideration on small components such as capacitors, switch contacts and the insulation on most of the signal carrying wires.

Once clean, the contacts are tinned with the iron, which leaves a thin layer of solder on the end of the wire or on the surface of a contact or solder tag. This prepares them to be soldered back into the circuit.

Tinning a wire

You'll encounter three sorts of wire in electric guitars: single-core, multi-strand and screened. Tinning a single-core wire is the easiest: first, strip off a short length of insulation to expose the wire inside, and scrape it with the knife. Next, apply the tip of the hot iron to the wire and wait a second or two for it to warm up. Now push one end of the solder onto the wire and watch as it melts instantly on contact. Pull the solder away from the wire and then remove the iron. The wire is properly tinned when the entire surface of the exposed end is plated with a thin coating of solder.

The most common wire you will encounter is multi-strand, which contains not just one core of wire as in the previous example, but many. These strands must be twisted together tidily before the wire is tinned; the twist and the solder tinning ties the strands together so that they will not unravel when finally joined into the circuit. Apply the iron and then the solder as before.

Although tinning is the simplest part of soldering many people decide not to bother with it, hoping that sheer force and willpower will make it happen correctly. Don't be tempted – a few moments cleaning and tinning can save hours of work and a bunch of deep-fried components.

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DRILLS FOR
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Carry On Pivoting

More fabulous pivot techniques, now applied to a diminished chord... and the cycle of fifths

Last month we were aiming at improving the coordination of the fretting hand fingers by working on a chromatic exercise and a lick for a minor chord – A minor, to be exact – both based on a pivoting technique. This month's exercises add the pivot lick for a major chord and a diminished chord; now you'll able to play the pivot licks in a cycle of fifths in the key of A minor.

A cycle of fifths chord progression is one in which the root note of each successive chord rises up by a perfect fourth (or down by a perfect fifth). In the key of A minor, the cycle of fifths chord progression is Am, Dm, G, C, F, Bdim, E, Am. Strum through these chords to get a feel for the sound.

You should know all these chords but just in case you don't know how to play a B diminished, it goes like this: second finger on the fifth string, second fret; third finger on the fourth string, third fret; first finger on the third string, first fret; and fourth finger on the second string at the third fret.

Remember last month's Exercise 2 – the lick for an Am chord? For the equivalent in Dm, play the very same Am lick but starting at the 17th fret on the top string.

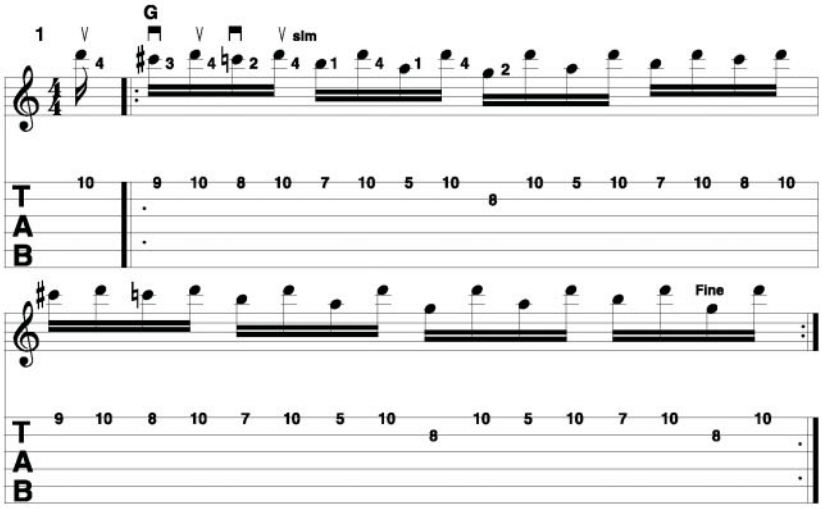
The following exercises illustrate the licks for a major and a diminished chord, so you can follow the chord progression with the licks. When practising these exercises, play through them with the repeat, then end at 'fine'. When playing the licks in the cycle of fifths, play through each lick once, again ending at 'fine', then moving immediately on to the next lick – hopefully producing a magnificent, continuous stream of semiquavers or sixteenth notes.

1 PIVOT LICK FOR A C CHORD

4/4 TIME

So here we go. For the C chord in this progression, start this pattern on the top string at the 15th fret; for the F chord, start the same lick on the top string at the eighth fret; and for the E chord, start the lick on the top string at the 19th fret.

Alternatively, if you feel like giving yourself a real stretch, start the E lick on the top string at the seventh fret. Play this note with your pinkie, and reach right down to play the same string at the second fret with your first finger. This stretch is not for the fainthearted, and is not to be played by anyone unless they're properly warmed up.

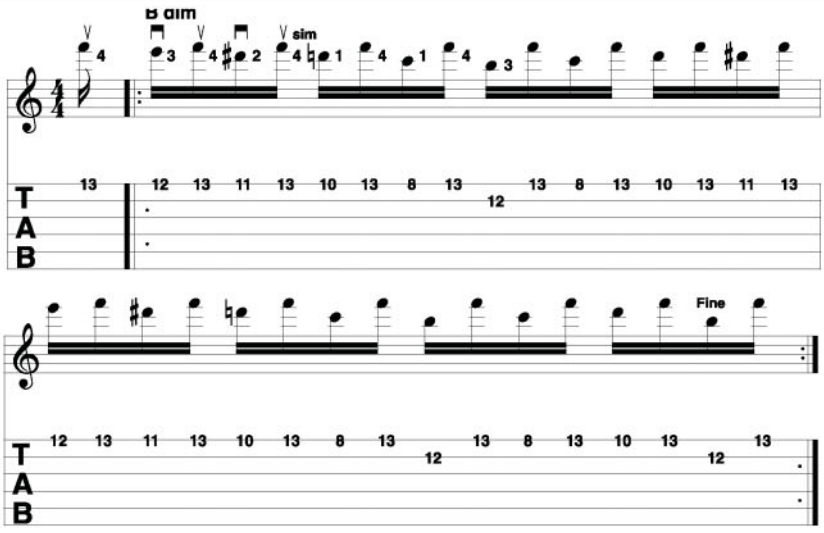


2 B DIMINISHED PATTERN

4/4 TIME

This is the pattern for the B diminished chord. At first, played out of context, it may sound a little strange – especially when you hit the B on the second string at the 12th fret. On the minor and major patterns, the lowest note in the pattern – on the second string – was fingered with the second finger, but do note that in this pattern the lowest note on the second string is fingered with the third finger.

Changing between licks requires significant position shifts. The key is to look ahead to see where you're going before you actually make the move. Bear in mind all the techniques outlined in last month's column, and try not to move the hand when playing each of the licks; find a good position for the fretting hand thumb and stretch with the fingers to reach the notes rather than moving the whole hand.



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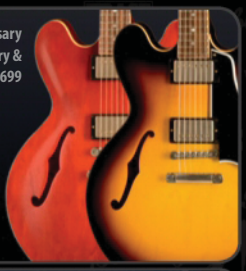

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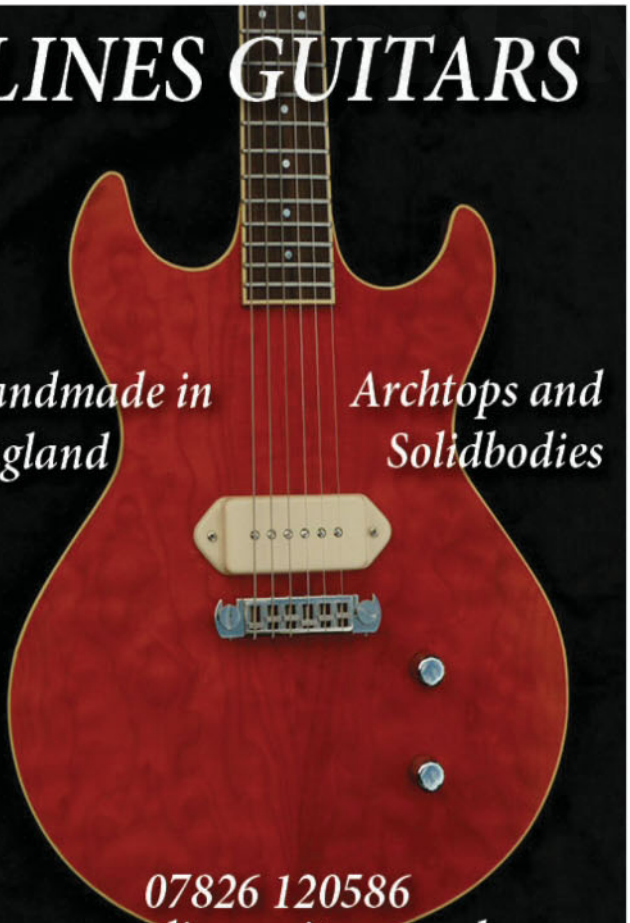

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4 valve	£64.80	4 valve	£64.80
5 valve	£81.00	5 valve	£81.00
6 valve	£97.20	6 valve	£97.20

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ECC82-5814A	£19.20	6L6WGB-5881	£36.00
ECC83-5751	£30.00	6L6GC-7581A	£66.00
ECC83-12AX7	£48.00	6V6GT	£30.00
EL84-6BQ5	£48.00	7027A	£48.00

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ECC83-Retro Cryo	£21.60	KT66- Retro Cryo	£48.00
EL34-Retro Cryo	£23.76	5U4GB- Retro Cryo	£24.00
EL84-Retro Cryo	£23.76	6550A-Retro Cryo	£33.60
EZ81-Retro Cryo	£24.00	6L6GC-Retro Cryo	£23.76
GZ34- Retro Cryo	£26.40	6550A-Retro Cryo	£33.60

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ECC83 STR	£14.40	GZ34-Retro	£18.00
ECC83-7025-STR	£14.40	5881-Mil Spec	£18.00
EL34-STR	£19.20	6L6GC- STR	£21.60
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EL84/E84L standard	£14.40	6550A-Retro	£28.80

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Groove tubes are one of the most respected valve brands in the World. Combine this with Watford Valves' special test facilities and Cryo treatment and you get distortion rated output valves which are burst tested and dual matched. All pre amp valves which are selected for low microphonics and drive tested for premium performance. The Cryo treatment takes these valves to new levels of performance and we have items that are special selected for Mesa Boogie amplifiers. These Cryo treated Super Premium are the best sounding GT available.

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EL84-S Cryo	£21.60	6V6GT-S -Cryo	£30.00

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Groove tubes are one of the most respected valve brands in the World. Combine this with Watford Valves' special test facilities and you get distortion rated output valves which are burst tested and dual matched on current and gain and pre amp valves which are selected for low microphonics and drive tested for premium performance.
These valves are called Super Premium as you get the best GT available.

GT	Standard	Super Premium	GT	Standard	Super Premium
ECC83-S	£16.80	£19.20	6L6GC-R	£21.60	£24.00
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EL34-LS	£22.20	£24.60	6L6GC-S	£24.00	£26.40
EL34-M	£19.20	£21.60	6V6GT-R	£19.20	£21.60
EL84-S	£14.40	£16.80	6V6GT-S	£24.00	£26.40

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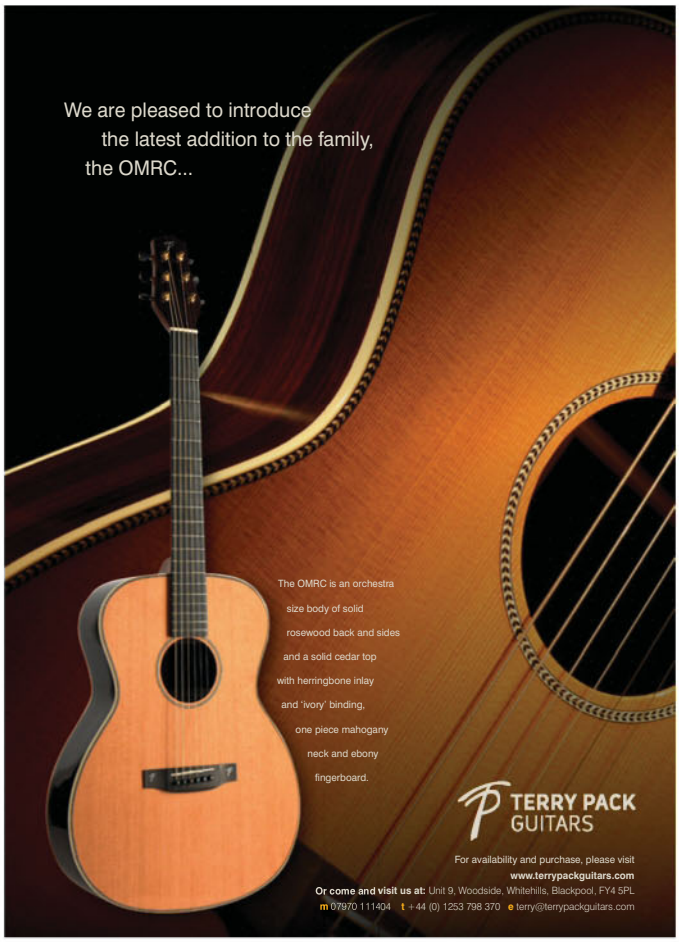

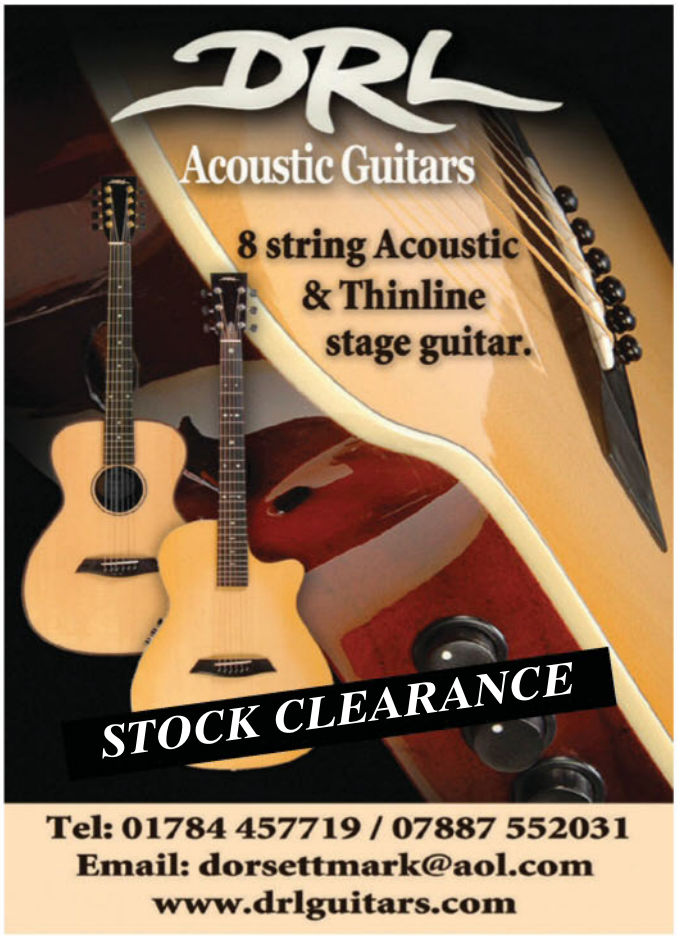

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Yamaha SA700, two for sale, Japanese-made early 1980s ES-335 clone, both excellent condition, cherry £675, blonde £695. Tel: John 01992 523138 or email johnblackman@ntlworld.com, Essex

Gibson Les Paul Custom, alpine white, right-handed guitar, 2012, hardly used, genuine reason for sale, £2200 ono. Tel: Nigel 07928 256305 or email nige142@hotmail.co.uk

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Egnator Rebel 30 combo and Roland-ready Strat, Mexican, white, must be good working condition, preferably London. Tel: Mick 020 8530 1208

Fender Tweed '50s Champ or Princeton or Deluxe amp, must be original. Tel: 0151 638 9567, Cheshire area

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Soundtrack of my life

Phil Campbell

Motörhead

The hard-riffing guitarist reveals his all-time favourite albums, a fine mixture of vintage rock classics ranging from the metallic to the melodic

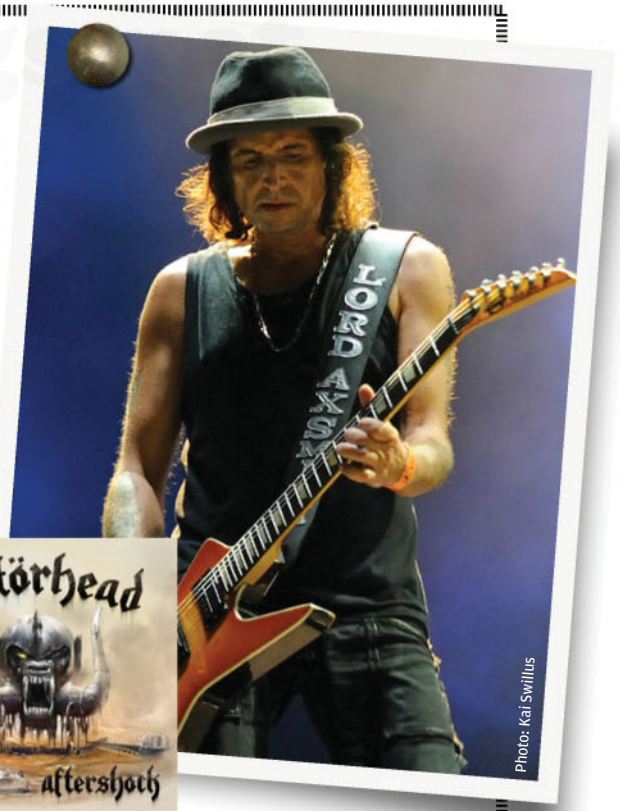

Photo: Kai Swillus

By February 2014 Phil Campbell will have been playing guitar alongside Lemmy Kilminster in Motörhead for no less than 30 years. One of his very first tasks in the band was to play a rendition of *Ace Of Spades* for an episode of the anarchic *The Young Ones* comedy show, and he's never looked back. There's been inter-band bickering, walk-outs and even broken bones, but the trio are still united and rocking out like teenagers. Campbell now owns around 400 guitars; his latest find is a '57 Les Paul Custom, but French company LAG built his Explorer-style 'Number One' axe and the guitar has become the definitive six-string sound of the band. The latest CD, *Aftershock*, is Phil's 15th studio Motörhead album, and it's a swaggering juggernaut of crunching, screw-you rock'n'roll – just the way we like them.

Jimi Hendrix

HENDRIX IN THE WEST

This has been deleted but I'm lucky enough to still have the original vinyl. It's seven tracks recorded live at the Filmore East and it's amazing. It's what first got me playing the guitar. Hendrix at his best – *Johnny B Goode, Red House, Voodoo Chile* and there's a track called *Lover Man*. Look hard and you might find a copy.

Status Quo

PILEDRIVER

This just knocks your head off. It was before they went all poncey, when they were a real brutal rock'n'roll band vamping it up with the 12-bar. The two after this were good, *Hello* and *Quo,* but if you want it undiluted with heads-down rocking it up, this is the album. It's not rocket science, just play it loud.

Black Sabbath

MASTER OF REALITY

I was about 12 or 13 when this came out. It was so dark and a bit scary. In those days you didn't know if they were real devil worshippers or not. Tony Iommi tuned way down until the strings were almost flapping. He's a riff-meister but he can play anything. *Children Of The Grave* is one of my favourite songs ever.

Led Zeppelin

II

I just love this, it's a fantastic record. Jimmy Page is a fucking genius! My favourites aren't the ones you'd expect – I like *What Is And What Should Never Be* and *Livin' Lovin' Maid*. I just bought a little Supro amp because I heard he played one on the first two Zeppelin LPs. In my eyes the man can do no wrong.

Fireball

DEEP PURPLE

Great drum sound on this... Ian Paice is on fire. Just three songs on one side and four on the other. It's brilliant stuff. Ritchie Blackmore was on form back then, he's a big inspiration. I've never met him and from what I've heard it'd be like meeting Robin Hood these days, but he can do what he likes... he's earned his stripes.

Allman Brothers

BROTHER AND SISTERS

Gregg Allman's voice on this is unbelievable. Sadly Duane Allman had gone by then, but Dickey Betts' playing on *Ramblin' Man* is great, and there's also *Jessica*, otherwise known as the theme from *Top Gear*. Another great track by the Allman Brothers is *Melissa* from *Eat A Peach*. That was Duane and I love it as well.

Eagles

EAGLES

For a debut album to come up with stuff like *Witchy Woman* and *Most of Us Are Sad* was outrageous. The whole album evokes a mood. Bernie Leadon can play any instrument under the sun. I like all the Eagles' stuff and I'm reading Don Felder's book at the moment, which is full of brilliant quotes.

Pink Floyd

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON

Sonically it's beautiful, lyrically it makes you think, the production is top-notch, the arrangements are brilliant and the cover is iconic... it's flawless. Gilmour's like a fucking astronaut on here, isn't he? His playing is perfection, he's way up on the ceiling. And all way before Protools or any of that kind of stuff. It's totally amazing.

Mike Oldfield

TUBULAR BELLS

He must have rented about 18 octopuses to push the faders on the desk when he did this. A brilliant piece of music. You have to thank Richard Branson for releasing it because no one had ever done anything like that before. In my young hippy stoner days I used to love it. Find some decent speakers and rediscover it.

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